**What spoke to me in Sacred Ground?**

**Betsey Anderson**

**Sacred Ground is a film and reading based dialogue on race. It is grounded in faith and was developed by the Episcopal Church.** It examines the chapters of American history while weaving in the participants’ family stories and their regional, economic, and political identities and experiences.

It is part of **Becoming Beloved Community**, our church’s long- term commitment to racial healing, reconciliation and justice in our personal lives, our ministries, and our society. It is about “becoming the people we long to be” as the Diocesan Mission Strategy so beautifully describes it.

Perhaps what spoke to me the most was the realization that what I learned about our country’s history in school was at best, incomplete, and at worst, as a member of the Sacred Ground dialogue group stated, whitewashed. Many of the sessions dealt with the settlement of our country, the people that were displaced, the ways immigrants were treated, and the policies and laws that treated people of different races and ethnicities so differently and unfairly.

I now have a better understanding of our history and how we got to where we are today. In particular, the treatment of indigenous people and continued challenges for Blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans are stunning and heartbreaking.

I am thankful for all I have learned from books and this series of films and readings, and what I have learned from those in my family and those I know who have had to face such deep inequities in their lives. My family is racially diverse, and I see the challenges my grandchildren continue to face as they become young adults in our community and have faced at times in our schools.

I am deeply saddened when I see how young black children are treated in ways that undermine their confidence in themselves and take away their hope for a better life. A recent statistic I heard is that black children who have one black teacher in school are 39% more likely to graduate from high school and over 13% more likely to attend college. This is just one example of how we continue to allow racism to be normal in our lives.

At many times during my life, I have had hope that things were getting better. In some ways things have improved, but I was overly optimistic that the changes we have made both legally and personally would be enough. Through Sacred Ground and continuing events in our society and our lives, I have come to a deeper understanding of how the odds are stacked against many and how they are systemic. This includes housing, education, our legal system, law enforcement, our jails and more. I recognize that I cannot be silent and must commit to support the profound changes that are needed in our laws and in our lives.

I recognize that we all have prejudices and will continue to address my own. I celebrate the efforts we are making in our own community to hold up diversity and to create support and opportunities for all. The Parents Diversity Council and our schools’ support of the Tenacity Challenge are two examples. I am encouraged that those who are becoming teachers are being taught a more complete view of our country’s history.

During a recent sermon, Chris made a statement that resonated with me. He said that “the Kingdom of God is something we grow. It is progress not completion.” I do have hope and a commitment to making our country a place where all are treated equally.

I look forward to continuing to learn and to find ways to share this challenging experience here in our parish and with others. I believe deeply that that we should treat others as we wish to be treated. I hope that I and that we at St. Paul’s can live this more fully and more deeply in our lives.

I would like to end with a statement from our Diocesan Mission Strategy that challenges us to be **Seekers of justice.**

**We recognize the dignity and inherent worth of every person, and we work to build communities where all people find fairness, compassion, and the freedom to live fully. We persevere in resisting evil, not just our own sins but the deep, structural sins of racism and oppression perpetuated in our name. We turn to the Lord for the grace to create honest dialogue, lasting transformation, and true reconciliation.**

**Amen.**

**Candy Walker**

From my experience with Sacred Ground, I definitely identified with “what I

didn’t know, I didn’t know”.

I grew up in Va. Beach, VA. I had plenty of history to learn and be exposed

to. I honestly loved history. Driving to northern VA to visit my paternal

grandmother, I would often ask to stop at many of the historical markers

along the route. There were numerous field trips during my school years to

the various famous historical places. There was Jamestown----Powhatan

and Pocahontas and the English. There were the battles of Bull Run,

Manassas, then Appomattox. We visited Mt. Vernon and Monticello. Slave

quarters were identified as a “matter of fact”. And there was Richmond and

its “Avenue of the Confederacy” statues. How very saddened and rather

shocked I was to learn SO much had been glossed over and the truth

stretched OR simply NOT told. I sadly believe we were kept from learning

so much and the truth held back.

I learned a great deal from Sacred Ground, much of it was quite painful.

Actually, it was a gut punch. I now acknowledge my ignorance about race

overall and how being white—with privilege no less—has humbled me. I

was privileged because I had a lovely, warm home, nice clothes, food on

the table, and lived a safe and comfortable life. I was privileged to not feel

the pain of the people of color around me or across this country; only to

begin to become aware as I entered college in the late 60s and into the

70s. I do now feel a pain that I never felt before---acknowledging and

noticing any people of color in my daily life that may appear to be

experiencing any injustice---like a black fellow being pulled over by police

with a toddler in the backseat, and I wonder and then yearn to ask, “Are

you okay? Is there anything I can do for you? Can you accept me into your

circle?”

How do I know what the next steps should be? It feels like a tightrope to try

to make reparations on my own. I admit being embarrassed to being white

in this day and time. I am ashamed of the lack of teaching the truth and the

poor and unacceptable treatment of any people of color.

I aim to continue to learn more about racial injustice and to support the

truth about our country’s history being told and taught. I want to be a

defender of unity and equity for all people.

We were challenged through Sacred Ground to try to explore how we might

try to fulfill our Baptismal Covenant, paraphrased here:

“We promise to, with God’s help, persevere resisting evil.

We promise to, with God’s help, try to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We promise to, with God’s help, strive for justice and peace among all

peoples, and respect the dignity of every human being.”

As a country, I know we have failed. As an Episcopalian, I recognize I need

to step it up to fully embrace this covenant.

I pray God will continue to guide me, and all of us, in the many ways to

love one another.

**Emily Mitchell**

I went into Sacred Ground thinking I probably already knew most of what we would read and talk about. I have read a lot about race and racial justice over the years, and I grew up in a community that was much more racially diverse than Bedford. I knew about Tuskegee; I knew about Tulsa; I knew about the Chinese Exclusion Act and the termination of Native nations. I thought Sacred Ground would help me revisit and reinforce the principles of equality and anti-racism that I try to live by.

And that was true: many of the events and concepts we covered were familiar to me. But discussing those things in a different context—not from a professional standpoint, not from a creative standpoint, not from a parental standpoint, but specifically as a Christian, with all the background and baggage that the designation carries—was a transformational opportunity.

As Christians we know we always fall short of the glory of God. We are supposed to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the widow and orphan, and welcome the stranger—but too often, we don’t. Within the Sacred Ground space, we were able to fall short together: to learn about atrocities against marginalized peoples past and present; and to revisit our own histories and understand how we have contributed to structural and individual harms.

The biggest takeaway from Sacred Ground for me was reinforcing the difference between fault and responsibility. The litany of abuse suffered by non-white people over the course of human history and our nation’s history may not be specifically or entirely my fault. But it is absolutely my responsibility, and our collective responsibility as Christians—especially those us of who are white Christians—to support, create, and nurture equity, reconciliation, and reparation going forward.

**Ginny Bradford**

Reflecting back on our fifteen or so meetings of Sacred Ground, I am grateful to have made the journey with the class, but to quote Psalm 38, “ my pain is always with me” as a result of the horrific racists practices we encountered as we were forced to take in the vicious and devious ways Anglo Americans, like me, have persecuted and trod on not only the indigenous people whose land this church is built on, but also all  the immigrants  who came to this land…..  the Spanish Americans, the Chinese, the Africans, the Mexicans….

There are two images from the class that stick with me vividly…… one of the Europeans arriving on these shores and seeing so many indigenous people actively pursuing their lives that they decided not to land………. And then in one of the last meetings being faced with the recent tragedy of the MicMac people, living close to us in Maine having their children ripped from their arms and sent to schools to Anglicize them, stripping them of their families, their language, their  culture and their tribal relationships ………. Assuming our culture is richer than theirs?

Every three weeks the class met and the racist practices of white Americans were thrust in front of us. This is history that is not taught in schools. One presentation was more horrifying then the last. It was seared into our eyes…..always with George Floyd’s  murder ever on our conscience. And the recent encounters of the Haitians at our southern border being beaten back by mounted police with whips brought the horrors of white racism that we were forced to see back into our eyes again.

Finding my place in this horrific history as an immigrant who came from an educated and professional German, Scottish and English heritage -- by chance of birth -- is a heavy and uncomfortable load to bear. How to make a difference in the face of such entrenched superiority?

How can we live “God’s Dream” so poignantly put forward by Desmond Tutu?  
That was the question the class left us with….. how to change hearts, minds, and actions?

Can the power of Love change this hurting world?  
Can we create a world where LOVE IS THE WAY?  
Where sacrificial love is redemptive?

How do we go forward with this self-awareness each day?  
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The opportunity to share this reality of racism in Sacred Ground with others has deepened my understanding and has created a web of consciousness that we carry forward together day by day.  I hope the Sacred Ground experience will continue to be offered here at St Paul’s and you may be able to experience it.

In closing I would like to share a prayer I wrote for the class:

We gather on this Sacred Ground with grateful hearts to come together to pray for your presence in this world- so full of pain, trauma, fear, violence and loss. We are stunned by our own ignorance in the part we have played to subject one people over another. We pray that as Jesus helped the blind, the blinders will be removed from our eyes and we will find the strength and direction to do our part and help bring the Kingdom of God to this hurting world.  In your name we pray, Amen.