

Queries around racism from NPYM

What is white privilege?

Most in our small group of Salmon Bay Friends participants thought that “white privilege” could better be replaced with “unlearned and unfair comparative racial advantage” but defined the term as “a catch-all phrase to express the advantages that white people have over others.” One Friend thought that the term white privilege conflates the multiple causes of these advantages, such as inherited advantages, structural discrimination, unconscious bias, and intentional discrimination and therefore does not make clear connection between the problem, causes and possible solutions. Another friend, while acknowledging the significance of the problem express concern that the specific language of “privilege” can create an unnecessary divide and doesn’t focus on unity. Other Friends described white privilege as “inherited advantages based on slavery;” or as “learning about discrimination versus experiencing discrimination.”

What responsibilities does advantage put on those who benefit from it?

We have a responsibility to learn, face, and raise awareness about “white privilege” and advocate for change but doing anti-racist work. We need acknowledge the suffering that has occurred and the institutional racism of policies and laws in our country. We can identify causes and solutions. We can speak up against unfair practices, becoming the “strongest and best ally” we can possibly can be. It’s important to some to participate in events that are community organized such as the MLK march or in groups such as the Coalition of Anti-Racist Whites (CARW) and Black Lives Matter (BLM). One Friend told a powerful story of the courage it took to ask neighbors to post BLM signs, only to have most of them stolen or destroyed shortly thereafter. Discussion occurred among those on the neighborhood electronic newsletter and now even more neighbors have the signs posted on their lawns! It was also suggested that we trust that people are good and not going to do dishonest or violent actions as many times when activities are report to the police they are done so in a manner that misdescribes a person, what they are carrying, or the intent of their actions.

What can Friends do about injustices that comprise our economic and social life? (What can we do to combat social and racial injustice)?

A Friend asked that we make welcoming, trusting spaces. Another Friend suggested that we be intentional about policies and look at each decision to make sure it’s inclusive. Other suggestions: seek out partnerships; educate yourself; create authentic cross-cultural relationships; build empathy (especially via exposure to diverse literature and art); consult with people of color about decisions that are being made and obtain guidance; teaching children through discussions, books, song, etc. about the issues that affect people of color. A Friend asked us to “realize that we show the most bias when we make decision quickly, fearfully or under stress,” so pre-think and plan for fairness. Another Friend suggested that groups might have a designated person to regularly report on events in the community that are about this topic. Review group signage, mission statement, literature, websites, photos and art to ensure diversity and inclusion.

What is our response to those who suffer from discrimination?

Suggestions from Friend in response to those who suffer is to not expect a person of color to educate you; be the strongest and best ally; call racism out when you see or hear it; acknowledge; work to alleviate; create personal relationships. A Friend mentioned that there is a workshop available in the area entitled, “What to say to my racist uncle.” Another Friend suggested that we not assume “white people” are homogeneous when we look around the room or have had the same level of experience with people of color; to not assume you know a lot about a person because their skin is the same color as yours.” We also should not assume we know how to help but instead to ask questions such as “What would you like from me? How can I better support you in the future?” Recognize that we are not being blamed as individuals but that we share the responsibility to relieve the suffering. Another Friend suggested we could offer the gift of accompaniment and keep the focus off ourselves and on the person who is suffering. “Listen under the words.” It was suggested that it could be a good experience to feel you don’t belong because many people feel that way routinely. A Friend shared a powerful story about being the only person of her color in a room and the guest to the event coming first and directly to her upon entering a reception to welcome her. This practice has become her own when she is in a gathering and in the majority.