

# Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at The Basilica

*An interview with Sarah Bellamy*

*Sarah Bellamy reflects on her work with Penumbra Theatre and The Basilica of Saint Mary*

In 2016, after the death of Philando Castile, The Basilica recognized a need to address the important issue of racism in our lives and society. As we began this work, we were led to partner with Penumbra Theatre and engage with Sarah Bellamy, Penumbra Artistic Director. Through small group conversations and workshops with staff and parishioners, Sarah Bellamy created a strategic and comprehensive report for The Basilica: The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity Opportunities and Challenges Analysis.

Upon completion of this analysis and reflection by parish leadership, initial recommendations of the report are being implemented. A twelve-member EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Leadership Team composed of parishioners began meeting September 2020. With guidance from Sarah Bellamy, they are working on parish-wide goals and strategies within The Basilica and the larger community.

## PENUMBRA THEATRE EVOLUTION

When George Floyd was killed, it became very clear more resources in our community were needed and Penumbra would be among those resources. His death was also a tragic realization the work we intended to do is needed—an affirmation we were on the right path. It is so unfortunate that it takes someone's death to make it clear to others this work is so badly needed.

The Penumbra Theatre, a 44-year-old Black arts organization, is evolving into a center for racial healing. In addition to launching new artistic offerings, the center provides racial equity coaching, leadership development, and supports people across sectors within the community.

Every organization attempting to do this work needs to be in conversations with other organizations. We need to be strategic—not duplicative—in our efforts. We need to use discernment to realize who our constituencies are and to figure out where our efforts can be most effective in helping people to feel equipped, strong, and courageous in working with people in addressing this deep wound.

BY JOAN PRAIRIE



#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BECOME ANTI-RACIST?

That is a complicated question, but the simplest answer is that to be anti-racist we must be actively and sustainably engaged in undoing the interlocking systems that endanger the lives and threaten the livelihoods of people of color.

Being anti-racist is an active resistance versus a passive lament. It means you are on a path that is constantly reflective, willing to learn, willing to stand up against injustice, willing to be uncomfortable situationally, psychologically, physically, and to put resources behind the effort.

Being uncomfortable doesn't necessarily mean being in danger or feeling pain. It does mean that anyone who is currently comfortable with the world as it is, rife with the viciousness of disparity that people of color currently experience in sector after sector, must question that comfort and realize that is inextricable from racial privilege that exempts them from feeling acute disparity. Anti-racism means that people with racial privilege sacrifice those comforts that come at the expense of others suffering.

#### PARTNERSHIP WITH THE BASILICA

As this EDI Analysis was getting underway and the conversations and workshops were being held, the staff and parishioners were all welcoming and generous, as well as, being introspective and honest about what is not known and where there are knowledge gaps.

The staff is looking forward to undertaking this work in a deep, meaningful, and transformative way. If the work that needs to be done means that members of The Basilica will need to change, there seems to be excitement in seeing that happen.

As the EDI Leadership team works to define The Basilica's EDI strategies and goals, we will do this in partnership together. The Basilica will take the lead with encouragement and guidance. With this working relationship, The Basilica will be equipped to create a plan and be empowered to carry the work forward.

From the very first conversations with The Basilica staff in 2016, there is a real, clear understanding this work is needed and could be powerful. The staff and parishioners also express a profound sense of humility. To be effective, one has to counterbalance this sense of humility with a sense of confidence and courage.

The work the EDI Leadership Team is embarking on is in alignment with that understanding and upon reflecting could see, like a stone thrown into a pond, the ripple effect with wider and wider ripples out. We can affect a very broad community, a really diverse community.

For all parishioners, regardless of their politics, of where they live, of how much wealth they may or may not have, regardless of their race, everyone has a strong deep connection to The Basilica. Your power is the strong deep connection parishioners feel to The Basilica. This work is connected to your mission. It is embodied in your values. And if you love this church, if you love this parish, it is an opportunity to deepen its impact not only within the parish, but as a leader within the larger community. ✚

*Joan Prairie has been an active volunteer and parish member since 1993 and is a member of the EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Leadership Team.*