

Reconciliation: Joining God's movement to heal and bring people into relationship across differences

St. Matthew's has been deeply involved in social justice work and reconciliation through the years. With many educators in our congregation, inequity in education has been a key focus. We have members who teach in the inner city; assist first-generation college students; help refugees connect with education and jobs; tutor children in reading, math, and science; or volunteer with [Interfaith Action](#)'s opportunity programs. Our members serve with a wide variety of nonprofits, and many parishioners work in social service areas, healthcare, or local government. Eight years ago, we devoted a year of community discernment to our social justice ministries, exploring how God might call us to partner with community organizations doing effective work in the Twin Cities. Since then, we have concentrated more efforts on upstream solutions to generational poverty and racial inequities.

Our actions around reconciliation take many forms. Our faith forums have facilitated hard conversations about racism, the criminal justice system, poverty, and public health. We listen, we learn, we pray, and we act. Our Art Ministry has hosted many shows that have focused on social justice issues, including a photography exhibition featuring portraits and stories of refugees and a seminar on the challenges they have faced. As a congregation blessed with many immigrant members, we celebrate each Epiphany season by adopting liturgy and music from a parishioner's home country. We have shared many dinners featuring foods and cultural traditions from our brothers and sisters across the globe. We value our ongoing relationship with Holy Trinity, a Black Episcopal congregation nearby. Our community is richer because of these many friendships across lines of difference as we listen, learn, and respect the burdens each one of us carries.



Devene bears the cross in our 2021 Good Friday Pilgrimage.

One powerful example of reconciliation was our 2021 Good Friday worship service, praying the Stations of the Cross on a pilgrimage through our neighborhood. Joined by our bishop and clergy from other churches, we followed the cross to significant sites, stopping to pray for international students and other communities at the University of Minnesota campus nearby, and ending near the site of Philando Castile's fatal shooting by a police officer during a traffic stop in 2016, at a garden dedicated to his memory.

Long-time parishioner Valerie Matthews, a Minneapolis educator who emigrated from Jamaica to study at the U of M, described the procession in our weekly newsletter, Tidings: "As Christians around the world observed Good Friday as a day of sorrow and commemoration of Jesus' death on the cross, so did St. Matthew's and other faith groups from our neighborhood... People of all ages, genders, and races walked footstep by footstep, led by the holy cross, stopping at various stations in our neighborhood to pray and reflect on scripture... Getting closer I could see all who were standing at the garden site and I could clearly see Valerie Castile, the mother of Philando Castile, standing with family and friends. I immediately thought of Mary, the mother of Jesus standing at the tomb of Jesus. It was a very powerful moment."



The procession walks along the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus.

At the memorial garden, Ms. Castile reflected on her son's legacy, and retired police officer Linda Finney from our sister congregation, Holy Trinity, offered prayers for law enforcement officers and spoke of the difficulties officers face in serving the public. Many parishioners speak of the Good Friday pilgrimage as a powerful public witness of Christian reconciliation.

Actions and conversations like these are not easy. We need God's grace to help us cultivate a posture of humility and generosity as we listen to people whose experiences and perspective differ from our own. We are thankful for our newest ministry, [Braver Angels](#), which aims to bridge the bitter partisan divide in American politics and culture. When we come together across lines of difference, we believe we experience a foretaste of God's heavenly kingdom, in which Christ is even now reconciling all things.