GOVERNANCE COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY

RACIAL EQUITY IN OUR GOVERNANCE

With the historic mission and faith heritage of Deaconess in mind, the Foundation Board of Trustees affirms that racial equity is critical to the effective pursuit of the health of the St. Louis metropolitan community and its people and the attainment of child well-being. It must, therefore, be integrated into the desired outcomes, processes and rituals of governance for Deaconess Foundation and the varied expression of the Deaconess mission.

Honoring the necessity of racial equity for the sustainability of our work, the Board of Trustees of Deaconess Foundation commits to policies, practices and procedures of governance which reflect our desired outcome of child well-being by aligning actions and expressions of governance with the reality of the young people we serve.

These commitments include, but will not be limited to:

- Diversity. Seeking a board demographic composition closely aligned with the community of children we serve and reflecting, through intergenerational membership, proximity of their perspectives;
- Inclusion. Listening to and prioritizing the perspectives of indigenous and impacted people when making decisions; and
- Equity. Monitoring organizational performance with goals for equitable outcomes, meaningful data disaggregated by race and metrics for success in historically under-represented groups.

As consistent with Deaconess’ Stated Governance Approach, accountability for pursuit of racial equity in governance will fall to the entire board as a committee-of-the-whole. Functional stewardship of the policies, practices and procedures will fall to the Executive Committee in its responsibility for board learning, personnel policy and nominating work.

MORAL OWNERSHIP OF OUR MISSION

The children and youth of metropolitan St. Louis are the moral owners of the Deaconess mission. The purpose of our governance is to serve them and reflect their interests.

For 130 years, the Deaconess mission has served successive generations in St. Louis. The grantmaking era, begun in 1998, has held an explicit focus on the health and well-being of children and youth. Each generation’s youth have faced challenges which the community has struggled to meet. Today, the young people we serve are identified by social scientists as Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2016. According to recent studies¹, Generation Z:

- Is more than one-quarter of the U.S. population (25.9%);
- Is the most ethnically diverse generation, with 49% identifying as Non-White;
- Is the most digitally savvy generation, with 98% owning smartphones, 92% with a digital footprint and 50% connected online at least ten (10) hours per day;
- Grew up during the Great Recession and/or recovery from it;
- Is deeply committed to intersectional equity, with 72% saying racial equality is the most important issue today. 64% say gender equality and 48% saying sexual orientation equality are most important.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2018 Kids Count Report:

The nation’s racial inequities remain deep, systemic and stubbornly persistent despite gains during the economic recovery for children of all races and income levels. On nearly all index measures, African-American, American Indian and Latino children continued to fare worse than their peers... As a result of

generational inequities and systemic barriers, children of color face hurdles to success on many indicators. African-American children were significantly more likely to live in single-parent households and high-poverty neighborhoods. American Indian kids were three times as likely to lack health insurance and more than twice as likely to live in neighborhoods with more limited resources than the average child. And Latino children were the most likely to live with a head of household who lacks a high school diploma and to not be in school when they are young.  

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT OF OUR WORK

The land upon which we work in the St. Louis region, constituted by the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council footprint in Eastern Missouri and Southern Illinois, and the location where Deaconess Center for Child Well-Being, stands was first cared for and occupied by Native American people, including Osage, Miami, Sioux and Iroquois groups, whose populations were decimated by systematic displacement through unjust cultural practices including the institutionalization of children, government action and capital-driven land acquisition.

Parents and community members seeking to raise healthy children in this area continue to be negatively impacted by the racially inequitable and unsustainable results of climate change and environmental racism. In our region and our work, we have encountered these impacts in the Foundation’s attempts to address lead poisoning with partners in the city of St. Louis, supporting the organizing of mothers due to landfills in North St. Louis County and investment in responses to asthma and allergy disparities for Black and Brown children.

DEACONESS’ UNDERSTANDING OF RACIAL EQUITY

Deaconess’ appreciation and understanding of racial equity is informed by our partners in mission, colleagues in philanthropy and community of service. Our learning journey has included:

- Deaconess’ engagement and leadership in several settings of the Ferguson Commission process (including Management and Volunteer service as Co-Chair, Managing Director, Legal Counsel and Loaned Executive) informing an expedited reflection process for the Foundation;
- Staff, trustees, board alumni and Community Advisory Board members being training in the ABFE Responsive Philanthropy for Black Communities Curriculum in March 2017;
- On April 4, 2017 (the 50th Anniversary of Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.’s famous “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence” speech at The Riverside Church (a UCC-congregation in New York), Management publishing Deaconess’ commitment to racial equity, entitled “Building A Community Just for Kids” on our website and to local publications, speaking to integration of racial equity into grantmaking and investment policy; and
- Establishing a Racial Equity Task Force, led by Trustee Rudolph Nickens, Jr., convened in 2018 to develop a plan for further integration into the Governance and Operations of the Foundation.

Founded in 1988 to improve outcomes for children and families through capacity building efforts, the Center for Assessment and Policy Development defines racial equity as:

*The condition that would be achieved if one’s racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.*

A New York-based community change institution, the Center for Social Inclusion, founded in 2001, defines racial equity as both an outcome and a process.

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As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one’s socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.

When we achieve racial equity:

- People, including people of color, are owners, planners, and decision-makers in the systems that govern their lives.
- We acknowledge and account for past and current inequities, and provide all people, particularly those most impacted by racial inequities, the infrastructure needed to thrive.
- Everyone benefits from a more just, equitable system.4

In the Ferguson Commission proceedings, Deaconess’ Racial Equity Task Force Chair, Rudolph Nickens, Jr., who serves as director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity for the Missouri Department of Transportation, provided the definition ultimately adopted by the body in its final report. He labeled racial equity as a “framework that promotes actions designed to address historic burdens and present-day barriers to equal opportunities through the elimination of systemic racially discriminatory policies and practices.”5

We accept that these definitions are aligned with our mission and theory of change. They express human intent which we interpret as deeply theological. Taken together, then, for us racial equity is both a stated, desired outcome (or hope) and a process or framework (a path of practice) for getting to the outcome.

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5 Forward Through Ferguson: A Path Toward Racial Equity (St. Louis, MO: The Ferguson Commission, 2015), 174.