DOING OUR OWN WORK

Working Assumptions

Developed by Allies for Change
(www.alliesforchange.org)

1. There are four realms in which systems of oppression and privilege are manifest in this society: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural. For change to be genuine and lasting, it must encompass all four of these realms.

2. Racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and every other form of structured inequality oppresses and exploits members of oppressed or target groups while granting unearned advantages and privileges to members of the privileged or non-target groups.

3. Most of us are members of non-target groups as well as being members of target groups.

4. Understanding where we stand in relation to systems of privilege and oppression, and unlearning the habits and practices that protect those systems, is life-long work for all of us, without exception.

5. The nature of structural power and privilege is that it is often invisible to those who have it.

6. Systemic oppressions (sexism, heterosexism, racism, ableism, etc.) intersect, reinforce each other, and bear similarities to each other, but these systems are not identical. Each has its own history and implications, requiring specific strategies for change.

7. "There is no hierarchy of oppression." (Audre Lorde) Trying to rank one group's pain over another distracts us from the urgent work of dismantling all forms of oppression. The focus of this institute will be racism.

8. Limiting the discussion about race and racism in the United States to a Black/White paradigm can render invisible the many other racial/ethnic communities that experience racism on a daily basis, including Latinx, Asian American, Arab American, Native American, and new immigrant communities.

9. We can become as passionate about dismantling the systems from which we benefit as we are about eradicating the systems that oppress us.

10. We have inherited divisions across many differences. Talking about them is not creating or perpetuating the divisions – it is one of the processes that we must go through to dismantle them.
11. Authentic relationships of solidarity and mutuality are not possible when we try to avoid the power imbalances that exist. Authentic relationships are possible only when those imbalances are honestly acknowledged and confronted.

12. Authentic and mutually life-giving relationships across differences “do not spring ablaze of themselves” (Adrienne Rich). Such relationships must be nurtured and sustained by a mutual commitment to truth telling, right-relationship, humility, deep listening, accountability, justice, and love.

13. Truth-telling, confrontation, and anger can co-exist with compassion, humility, and forgiveness.

14. Every community has rich cultural traditions and proud histories of struggle. If we wish to be effective agents of change in our communities, we are beholden to learn about the work of those who have gone before us.

15. Allies are not solo acts; our work as allies must always be rooted in collaboration, humility, and accountability.

16. Because we are all in process, the facilitators of this seminar are seekers and learners every bit as much as the participants.

17. The work of dismantling systems of oppression and privilege is never done, once and for all.

18. To sustain the work of dismantling systems of oppression and privilege, we need to share experiences, insights, wisdom, energy, hope, and joy with each other.