Momentum Center

Town hall meeting to explore racism in the justice system

By Tribune Staff
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The Momentum Center will continue its “Race & Racism Community Conversation Series” on Monday, Feb. 22, from 6:30-8 p.m.

The town hall includes a panel discussion on “Race & The Justice System.” It will focus specifically on mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline, followed by an open question-and-answer period.

Speakers at the event will be Rik Stevenson, Nathan Jones and Timothy Steward.

Sara Schambarger, right, holds the hand of her husband, George Barfield, as the two kneel during a Demonstration for Racial Justice and Equality at Grand Haven’s Central Park in 2020.

Tribune file photo / Matt DeYoung
Stevenson is an educator with more than 30 years of teaching experience in multiple institutions of higher education, including as adjunct professor at Grand Valley State University. He taught in the Area and Global Studies Department and Liberal Studies, and in the Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies. His talk will focus on “how racist attitudes fostered slave catching which, in turn, led to policing.” He will also speak to how the end of Reconstruction and the Convict Lease System were instrumental in the development of Jim Crow Laws and the criminalization of blackness.

“Racism is the fundamental reason that the prison system exists, as we know it today,” Stevenson said.

Jones, a learning coach at Escape Ministries, will use his personal experience to show one’s court system past should not define you. Working with Escape Ministries has shown Jones that “underlying racism feeds the school-to-prison pipeline.” He also said the “profiling and strict zero tolerance policies in schools do not address issues, but instead result in kids getting thrown out of schools and falling through the cracks.”

Steward, in his podcast “This is the Situation,” speaks from his diverse life experiences in a transparent, spiritual manner. He noted that he is “a recipient, not a victim of systemic racism.” He feels that “together we all must admit and expose how racist attitudes are relevant today and how our leader local and state officials should get on board with bringing about changing this problem.”
To register for the town hall, visit the Momentum Center website at momentumcentergh.org/town-hall-racism.