

Living into Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice Our Journey in Ages Past, Our Commitment in the Years to Come

Preface

Shalem Institute is celebrating its 50 years of existence. In those 50 years, various people (board members, staff, program directors and participants) have raised questions about diversity in Shalem's program offerings, resources, and intent to recognize and honor the contemplative traditions across racial, ethnic, and gender boundaries. They all, in their respective ways, have desired to honor the dream of God: God's vision for an inclusive, diverse, and beloved community that lifts the contemplative way of being and leadership and, in doing so, heals the world.

The Shalem Contemplatives of Color/BIPOC Advisory Committee would like to be able to cite the years and names of all those individuals who have worked so diligently over the years to advocate, engage, and yes sometimes even agitate for more inclusion. While there is no available recorded history, we recognize those names and dates are less important than the recognition of the intent of many hearts to nourish the desire of the Divine to nurture this dream.

Sacred texts in many traditions acknowledge this unity in the beauty and wonder of diversity. The Shalem community is deeply committed to that dream of love that is the Holy One's continuing desire. May we all continue to work in partnership with God to make it so.

Background

In 2021, the Shalem Program Committee began to give careful attention to discerning what may be the call for Shalem to live into diversity, equity, inclusion and justice, (DEIJ), especially as it relates to our programs. The question guiding for this work was:

"How can we as Shalem in our wholeness create a loving, just and merciful listening space where we might grow shared language, raise our consciousness, and welcome formation with fresh, open minds around the notion of equity and justice, being in right relationship among people and institutions, creating a wholeness where all have what they need to be fully alive?"

The Shalem Program Committee focused on the issue of diversity, equity and inclusion through several initiatives: 1) met with the Program Directors of all Long-Term programs, to include reading lists and curricula; 2) engaged and surveyed over 100 self-identified Contemplatives of Color/BIPOC Shalem graduates and established a directory; and 3) reported to the board on these initiatives and recommended next steps.

Two recommendations in particular emerged from this work:

1) We at Shalem must engage more People of Color as thought and conversation partners, facilitators and leaders of Shalem programs; and 2) Shalem must continue to do the transformative work of addressing issues of racism and injustice and preparing its program

participants to pay greater attention to those issues with the people and communities they serve.

Shalem Contemplatives of Color/BIPOC Advisory Committee

Founded in 2021, The Shalem Contemplatives of Color/ BIPOC Advisory Committee was established to gain a deeper understanding of our community, enhance connections within it, inform our programs, and provide recommendations to support Shalem's ongoing efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion. The committee also organizes and convenes virtual gatherings to support and grow the community.

Trinity Church Grant

Thanks to a generous grant from Trinity Church Wall Street, Shalem received funding to support the DEIJ initiatives, including: innovating curriculum for long-term leadership programs; hiring a DEIJ consultant; providing scholarship support for travel for residencies as well as book stipends, and the publication of the edited book *Soul Food: Nourishing Essays on Contemplative Living and Leadership (2023)*; and translation of this report in Korean, Spanish, and French.

Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging incorporate all of the elements that make individuals distinct from one another. While there are infinite differences in humans, many these days subconsciously define diversity by gender, race, age, sexual orientation and physical/mental ability. Further, the focus of DEIJ is narrowed to simply retention and recruitment. For this endeavor, we are committed to thinking expansively as we plan for the Shalem of the future, the Shalem that is becoming.

2023 Survey

The 2023 survey was adapted from the 2021 survey. We included new questions and, for the first time, collected information about race/ethnicity, gender pronouns, faith traditions, and what brought participants to Shalem. Among our findings were:

Of those who responded to the survey, 77% self-identified as Black or African American, 15% as Asian; 4% as Latino/Hispanic; and 4% as Multi-Racial.

We noticed a trend where the majority of the list identified as Christian. We saw other participants identify as having multiple faith traditions, usually Christian paired with another tradition, along with a few identified primarily as multifaith/ interfaith.

For short-term programs, Group Spiritual Direction was most popular, and for long-term programs, the Soul of Leadership.

Respondents often found Shalem out of their own interest in growing their spiritual practice. Many came as a result of being recommended by someone in the Shalem community. Others were drawn to a specific program.

Moving Forward

The Shalem Contemplatives of Color/ BIPOC Advisory Committee looked at the results of the 2023 Survey and developed three areas to address in our next steps. Following are some of the specific ideas in these areas:

Coordinate Outreach

- Develop an ambassador program to equip people to share about Shalem with community groups
 - Shalem in your City
 - Shalem at your School
 - Shalem on Campus
- Visually map out where our community already exists geographically
- Schedule regular online offerings to share about Shalem
- Organize outreach around churches, denominations and other faith/spirituality groups
- Provide training to people wishing to reach out to their own communities
- Build strategic partnerships with people and existing organizations to enhance and complement the work of Shalem

Cultivate Belonging

- Teach about unconscious bias and take steps to become conscious of bias and re-train ourselves
- Ensure leaders of all programs are trained to recognize, acknowledge and unlearn unconscious bias in themselves and participants
- Assess the way Western culture has colonized spirituality and take steps towards decolonization
- Provide offerings in languages in addition to English and with translation into those languages
- Provide ASL Interpretation for Shalem Events and Programming
- Make our inclusion of LGBTQIA+ community members explicit
- Be intentional about recognizing intersectionality amid conversations about diversity

Curate Offerings

- Provide and maintain an opt-in directory of BIPOC participants of Shalem programs
- Craft an annotated bibliography of resources speaking from and to the experience of contemplatives of color
 - Compile list of books recommended from within our community with brief reviews
 - Identify podcasts by and for BIPOC contemplatives
 - Select films that tell the stories of BIPOC involved in contemplative life and leadership
- Create an online community for crowd-sourcing additional resources,

workshops, experiences, events and partner organizations

It is both our intent and commitment that the information that we have curated will be a resource to the Shalem community, especially for those who completed the survey.

The Advisory Committee will play a key role in working with the DEIJ consultant, but will not accept the burden of responsibility for making this work happen. In addition to the initial noticeable lack of racial, gender and age diversity, further conversations have lifted up the need for equity, inclusion and justice in the way we act as a community. Shalem board and staff leadership must listen to the voices of those least represented if we desire anything to change, but not leave it up to others to make the changes.

Conclusion

The vision that the Board adopted in 2022 is that “In 2025, Shalem will be a dynamic and inclusive community, empowered by the Spirit, where seekers engage in transformation of themselves, their communities, and the world through spiritual growth, deep connection, and courageous action.”

At Shalem, one can hear, “we’re seeking to live the contemplative life” or “we are contemplatives.” The CoC/BIPOC Advisory Committee has been asking the question, “Who is the ‘we’?” leading to the imagining of who the “we” could be. Working and reflecting on the “we” is Shalem’s on-going commitment.

Shalem’s mission to nurture contemplative living and leadership remains the same. In the next 50 years this must be done with an explicit commitment to racial and social justice, by engaging a broader diversity of previously unrepresented communities for programming, staff and leadership roles and completing regular assessment of program resources for contemporary relevance. This is our ongoing hope and commitment.

Shalem Contemplatives of Color/BIPOC Advisory Committee

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