



common ground

COMMUNITY STORIES

new bedford
whaling museum

Pamela McNamara

My name is Pam McNamara. I first came to Padanaram in Dartmouth when I was 10 years old with my mother and our good friends, the Gladstones. John, Whitney, and I fished off the bridge there. 30 years later, my husband, George, and I moved back to Dartmouth in 1995 with our children, Casey and Tim. But I really arrived in New Bedford in 2001 when I began attending services at Grace Episcopal Church. I've been attending the 5:00 PM Saturday service ever since. Why did I come to Grace? Why did I come to New Bedford? Initially, it was a combination of convenience of the 5:00 PM Saturday service and Grace's reputation for the work that it did in the New Bedford community. I'd heard that Grace reached out to people living in our city and our community, finding people and listening to their needs wherever they were, and finding ways to make a difference.

Sure enough, Grace has been making a difference for a long, long time. Community breakfasts on Sundays, Martha's Food Pantry, laundry love, and many other outreach ministries. Those are just some recent ones. I was also struck by how Grace reaches out to other churches and community organizations to figure out the needs and coordinate who's doing what and to work together. Then during the dark ages of the COVID pandemic, our Reverend Chris Morck began offering a Zoom discussion group on racial and social justice. Each time we met, Chris shared short videos on different topics about racial and societal injustices. Then we talked, I listened, and we learned from one another. The 12 or so people on our Zoom visits were a mix of backgrounds, black and white, old and young, from Grace in New Bedford, as well as folks beyond Grace and from far away, including Seattle.

Somehow these conversations and visits planted seeds of urgency in me for more, more education, more learning, and to somehow get involved in working for justice. With Reverend Chris, Reverend Melissa Howell, Andrea Madeiros, Blinn Dorsey, Cynthia Poyant, and Memory Holloway, we started stirring up some good trouble. We named ourselves the Justice Community at Grace. This year, we've hosted two screenings of the documentary film, *Traces of the Trade*. Originally presented at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, the documentary produced and directed by Katrina Browne, follows Browne as she uncovers the story of her forefathers, the DeWolf family of Bristol, Rhode Island. Browne and her nine members of her family are shown on a personal journey of discovery along the Triangle of Trade, from Bristol, to slave forts on the coast of Ghana, to the ruins of the family's former plantation in Cuba.

The DeWolf family was the wealthiest and largest slave trading family in all of North America. In January this year, 2023, in collaboration with the New Bedford Whaling Museum, we screened the film at the Museum's Cook Memorial Theater. Facilitators, Dain Perry, a descendant of the DeWolf family, and Constance Perry, a descendant of people enslaved, led a discussion immediately following the film. Approximately 90 people from around the region attended. And we're grateful for the Whaling Museum's collaboration and support, especially my friend, Ricardo Bermudez, who introduced us to Amanda McMullen, Naomi Slipp, Beatriz Oliveira, and others, all great collaborators. We did a second screening of *Traces* on Zoom with Constance and Dane again facilitating in April. And we've just wrapped up a book discussion of *Waking Up White* by Debby Irving, also facilitated graciously and with sensitivity by our dear friends, Constance and Dain.

We're now plotting next good stuff. We're grateful to be collaborating with the Whaling Museum, the YWCA, the Historical Society, UMass Dartmouth, other religious and community organizations, and many others. It's a long journey ahead. I will hit potholes myself, and I know I'm going to make embarrassing mistakes, but it's urgent to keep going. I'm grateful to be here in New Bedford and to be with my friends in the same boat together on this journey. Thank you for the chance to share my story, which I'm doing from the Grace Church nursery at the back of the church. Thank you so much.