

RELIGION

GRAND HAVEN

Town halls to explore 'Religion and Racism'

CONTRIBUTED

"Religion and Racism" is the topic of four upcoming town halls in Grand Haven led by the (Anti) Racism Task Force.

Last season's town halls focused on public health, education and the criminal justice system. The latest series was selected based on requests from town hall participants and will be co-sponsored by the Kaufman Interfaith Institute.

The Monday, Oct. 25, town hall will provide historical context of Christianity and racism, while the Nov. 8 meeting will focus on what is happening in churches today in terms of racism. The Dec. 13 town hall will address the fact that Christianity is not the only religion in our area and will explore the response to racism in other faith traditions — including Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. The Jan. 24 town hall will focus on Christianity and Native and Indigenous people.

Town halls, which are currently available only on Zoom, run from 6:30-8 p.m.

Convened by the Momentum Center, the (Anti) Racism Task Force town halls will provide panelist presentations, a question-and-answer period, and community conversation by way of breakout discussion sessions. Panelists are Victoria Proctor Gibbs, Robert "Rik" L. Stevens and Gordon Wiersma.

Gibbs is a founder of Congregations Organizing for Racial Reconciliation (CORR) and is currently a co-chairperson and lead coach. Committed to an anti-racism focus from a Christian perspective, CORR aims to be an inclusive Christian community that does not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, mental health, or educational and economic power.

A professor of African-American studies at the University of Florida, Stevenson holds master's degrees from Fuller Theological Seminary, a doctorate in divinity from the Southern California School of Ministry, and a doctorate in African-American and African studies from Michigan State University. He teaches courses in the Civil Rights movement and the Black campus movement.

"Racism," according to Stevenson, "is a public health issue."

Wiersma, who has been co-pastor at Hope Church (RCA) in Holland since 1999, has been part of building creative coalitions for equity, inclusion and justice. He holds a bachelor's degree from Calvin College, a master's of divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and a doctor of ministry degree from McCormick Theological Seminary.

Suggested reading for the



A peaceful protest march begins along the bluff in downtown St. Joseph on April 15. It was sponsored by Neighbors Organizing Against Racism.

Oct. 25 town hall is "America's Original Sin" by Jim Wallis.

Participants can register for the town hall at momentumcentergh.org/town-hall-racism.

Participants will need the Zoom app to take part in breakout sessions following the presentations and community conversation.

"Town halls are opportunities for people to talk about their experiences and the experiences of others so we can all learn from and appreciate a variety of perspectives," said The Momentum Center's Barbara Lee VanHorsen. "Ground rules emphasize we are not gathering to debate but to share our experiences

and listen to the honest experiences and beliefs of others. We work hard to create a safe environment for sharing so that we can find our common concerns and work toward our common goals."

The Kaufman Interfaith Institute is part of a rich history

of interfaith dialogue in West Michigan. The Kaufman Institute brings together diverse voices and worldview traditions to find common ground, foster interfaith cooperation, and elevate individual experiences and stories.

The Momentum Center in

Grand Haven is a grassroots movement to create a stigma-free community. It does that by hosting community conversations and operating The Momentum Center for Social Engagement that addresses mental illness, addictions and disabilities.

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