

## Clergy Conversations – Responding to Racism June 10, 2020

**Presenters:** Rev. Debra Mason, WPAUMC Coordinator of Diversity Development & Inclusion  
Members of John Wesley UMC in Washington & Christ UMC in Bethel Park  
Members of Washington District Anti-Racism Team  
Members of Erie-Meadville District Anti-Racism Team

### Helpful Resources shared:

- Book, *America's Original Sin* by Jim Wallis
- Book, *How to Be An Anti-Racist* by Ibram X. Kendi
- Video series w/ discussion guides, *Vital Conversations*, [www.gcorr.org](http://www.gcorr.org)
- Book, *Witnessing Whiteness* by Shelly Tochluk
- Film, *I Am Not Your Negro* by James Baldwin
- Book & documentary, *White Like Me* by Tim Wise
- District Anti-Racism teams in every district (contact DS for info)
- Book, *Birth of a White Nation* by Jacqueline Battalora
- Book, *Stamped from the Beginning* by Ibram X. Kendi
- Crossroads Antiracism training, [www.crossroadsantiracism.org](http://www.crossroadsantiracism.org)
- Intercultural Development Inventory, [www.idiinventory.com](http://www.idiinventory.com)
- Article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh

Rev. Ross Pryor, Pastor of Aliquippa UMC, offered devotions from Genesis 33:4-11, considering what was required for conciliation between Jacob & Esau. Jacob had to take responsibility for harm caused; Esau offered acceptance rather than retribution.

Rev. Debra Mason reminded us of The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, paragraph 5, which declares that The United Methodist Church proclaims the value of each person as a unique child of God, commits itself to the wholeness of all persons, and recognizes that the sin of racism has been destructive throughout our history.

### Partnership between John Wesley UMC & Christ Bethel Park UMC

Gail Cochran & Selena Evans – JWUMC ; Marilyn Larrimer & Jeanna-Mar Simmons, CUMC

- Began in July 2018 after members at Christ UMC (a primarily white congregation) read "America's Original Sin" and then asked John Wesley UMC (a primarily black congregation) if they would partner. Now approximately 12-20 people from the two congregations meet monthly for conversation and take occasional field trips together.
- The two most significant experiences have been watching *I Am Not Your Negro* (James Baldwin) together and discussing it, and traveling together to the Museum of African American History in Washington, DC
- Current focus: Addressing the differing impact of COVID-19 on black and white communities in Pennsylvania & supporting voter registration efforts.
- Greatest impact: Learning from each other, particularly about different life experiences in the same local communities. Building caring relationships. Moving from education to advocacy and action. Developing enough trust to speak honestly, call one another out, and share openly without fear of offending.

Washington District Anti-Racism Team – Rev. Dawn Hargraves and Rev. Erik Hoeke

- The 14-person District Team has been meeting since 2019, though anti-racism work has been going on in the district for much longer.
- Team reads the same books/material for their own development and offers workshops and training in the district.
- Learnings:
  - The need for white persons and churches to confess silence in the face of racism.
  - The challenges of speaking from a privileged position: Sometimes, we need to make room for and listen to other voices; sometimes, we need to speak up.
  - Being an ally requires discernment and self-awareness. Allow people of color to speak for themselves, and if they are ignored or disrespected, speak against the disrespect, while still allowing them to speak for themselves.
  - Need to move beyond fear of being criticized; you will not always get it right.

Erie-Meadville District Anti-Racism Team – Rev. Sara Roncolato & Erica Rushing

- The 10-person District Team has only been meeting for about six months, although a group of district clergy did anti-racism work for several years. Most team members have participated in Crossroads Antiracism Training.
- Learnings:
  - Pastors need to take the lead on antiracism conversations in the church, and encourage and empower passionate lay people to speak up.
  - White people need to have conversations with other white people. Be willing to question why someone makes a particular statement; go back to the conversation, and say, “I want to talk to you about that.”
  - Public confrontations – especially online - often shut down conversation. It is best to speak to some privately, use direct messaging, or make a phone call to invite ongoing conversation.
  - Use movies, documentaries, and current events to invite conversation.
  - We don’t identify ourselves as allies; others identify when we are acting as allies.
  - Importance of tension: we need enough tension to spark change, but not so much that it destroys community. White churches, in particular, need to grow in our ability to be uncomfortable and stay in the tension.

**Summary:** Wesley’s 3 Simple Rules provide a good framework for anti-racism work: First, do no harm; do not add to the problem with your actions or words. Then, seek out ways you can do good.