

Racism Conversation Summary & Next Steps

On Sunday, October 23, approximately 50 adults participated in a conversation about how we can live out the vision of the elders position paper on Racism and Embodied Reconciliation more fully. The event was lively, and there was a spirit of unity and collaboration that made it both energizing and sweet. The elders were deeply encouraged by this spirit!

Many good ideas were shared. As each table group reported their key insights with the rest of the group, several shared priorities emerged:

- Include more people of color in leadership
- Diversify our worship gatherings to include music and other expressions from a broader range of cultures
- Look for opportunities to share stories about people's cultural background, minority experience, and experience following Jesus in a variety of cultural contexts
- Cultivate one or more ongoing partnerships with a multi-ethnic church or an organization serving a multi-ethnic population here in the Valley (i.e., Holyoke, Springfield)
- Take time to visit churches outside of our tradition and look for opportunities to experience being a minority.
- Share our resources with an under-resourced congregation or support inner-city justice initiatives.

Hundreds of other ideas were shared during the event that touch on many aspects of church life. Here is a sample:

- Offer GROW Classes on the history and legacy of racism, the global church, and embodied reconciliation
- Seek out Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Training specifically aimed at churches
- Interview people about their cultural and/or church backgrounds
- Invite people of color to lead worship and preach
- Explore ways of increasing accessibility (i.e., sign language, translation services, Bibles in other languages)
- Find opportunities to learn the history of the abolitionist and civil rights movements in the valley
- Find ways to support disadvantaged populations in the valley (inner city, low income housing, refugees)
- Learn more about our own ethnic identities (i.e., discuss the book Beyond Color Blind)
- Visit the African American Museum in Springfield
- Launch a new (or join an existing) Circle of Care to support a refugee family
- Include people of color and/or indigenous leaders among our Gospel Partners
- Organize a Progressive Dinner where we practice hospitality and share cuisine and traditions from our ethnic heritage
- Read and discuss books about racial justice and the global church
- Watch and discuss movies (i.e., Harriet, 42, Just Mercy, Crash, others)
- Set aside day(s) to fast and pray for racial reconciliation (MLK Day, Juneteenth)
- Weave gospel-centered racial justice themes into our Children's Ministry curriculum
- Create a lending library with books on racial justice and multi-ethnic fellowship

Where do we go from here?

Some of the ideas that were shared can be implemented easily. For instance, Paul Sorrentino and Dave Rittner have already begun curating a book table, our GROW team is planning to offer GROW classes this winter and spring on topics related to our conversation and Naomi Desilets is investigating opportunities for us to support recently resettled refugees. Book discussions, movie nights and field trips can be intentionally woven into our calendar to increase our awareness. If you are passionate about any of the ideas and would like to play a role in implementing them, please talk with an elder or appropriate ministry leader.

Other ideas will take time to implement, but need to be prioritized as we move forward, for instance: diversifying our worship expressions, evaluating and augmenting our children's ministry curriculum and including more people of color in leadership. We invite you to pray for and hold us accountable to these priorities in the months and years ahead!

Finally, there is a significant appetite for developing an ongoing partnership with a local church or ministry where we can cultivate a relationship over time: sharing fellowship and worshipping and serving side by side. We agree that this would be a wonderful way to live out the vision of the paper, enrich our lives and cultivate greater unity across the Body of Christ.

From our experience, these partnerships tend to flourish 1) when they emerge out of genuine friendship and trust and 2) when a critical mass within each community is primed and ready to "cross the road" with curious minds and compassionate hearts.

To that end, we plan to offer a class this winter to begin priming us for such a partnership. Such a class may include understanding the challenges and opportunities of multi-ethnic fellowship and how we can navigate diverse relationships with sensitivity and love. Other classes down the road may explore the history and legacy of racism, what we can learn from other cultures about how to read the Bible, and how to do justice and pursue reconciliation in our day to day lives. We believe this is an important step for laying the groundwork for strong, flourishing partnerships.

A second step may include seeking out who in the congregation already has established relationships with people from other local churches and ministries that are not majority white.

We trust God's leading and equipping in all of this, and we look forward to continuing and deepening our conversation after the New Year!

It's All About the Kingdom!

The Elders of College Church