

BECOMING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

A Journey Toward Racial Justice and Inclusion



A Moment for Racial Justice

By Ann Baggett

I always knew that racism existed, but I was sure that I was not a part of the problem, and, sadly, for a long time, that seemed to be enough for me. Speaking about systemic racism and racial injustice was extremely uncomfortable, so I simply avoided it in “polite” conversation.

As a high school English teacher, I felt it was crucial to educate my students about racial justice and inclusion through discussions of relevant books. But even with facilitating careful conversations about systemic racism and awareness in a classroom full of students, an in-depth understanding of my white privilege didn't really hit home for me personally until earlier this summer.

Following the brutal death of George Floyd, I decided to read the book *White Fragility* (Robin Diangelo) and was deeply saddened to discover the myriad ways in which I have been complicit in the system of racism. The book itself addresses white privilege head on and will surprise and convict you with its insight into systemic racism. I would recommend it for anyone who wants to learn and progress in their personal journey.

Since reading this book, I have decided to do some more serious soul-searching on my own role in being silent and often indifferent to the pain of Black brothers and sisters. As a Christian, I am now deeply concerned with doing the personal and introspective work toward racial justice and inclusion in my own life, and I want to continue to be concerned with that work. It's not enough for me to "not be a part of the problem." I want to be part of the solution. I look forward to our collective journey toward racial justice and inclusion as we do the good work of becoming the beloved community.

BECOMING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

A Journey Toward Racial Justice and Inclusion



A Moment for Racial Justice

By Bill Belvin

What I've Learned (and am still learning)

This is about "white privilege," a concept concerning which I'd heard very little until only a few years ago, but which I now realize has defined much of my life. I am a child of proud North Carolinians, the grandson of a Methodist minister and a church organist/choir director. My first seven years of public education were spent "up Nawth" during which there were exactly two African-American students in my school, and they were five years ahead of me. Upon my family's return south, I completed high school in an all-white school. I attended a fine Methodist university in which not one person of color was enrolled.

My father worked hard as the family provider; my mother stayed home to rear her two children, although there was a "colored woman" who came in once weekly to clean and iron.

What is the point here? Simply this. There is no way in which I could have begun to comprehend the life experience of persons with whom I had no contact; no way in which I could have begun to empathize with their hopes, dreams, fears, and, yes, resentments. And what's more, I never appreciated how I was embarking on a life with a decided "leg up," irrespective of whatever talents, skills or abilities with which I may have been blessed.

As we journey together as a church toward "Becoming the Beloved Community," my prayer is that each of us will take this as an opportunity, in the words of the apostle Paul, to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," remembering that "God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2: 12b-13).

BECOMING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

A Journey Toward Racial Justice and Inclusion



A Moment for Racial Justice

by Beth Corley

God blessed me with an analytic mind. I love nothing better than to dig into a complicated statistical table and find the human stories hidden within. I spent my professional career in a research and statistics agency in state government. Our only mandate was to find data, build policy-relevant data systems in healthcare, human services and demographics and to analyze them for the betterment of SC citizens. We had the privilege of building a model for understanding where our problems were most severe, monitoring interventions we were trying that could remove barriers and make lives better, and then evaluating our success. It became abundantly clear, over and over, that we found disparities, with many problems intersecting in the same geographic areas, disproportionately affecting the poor and particularly, persons of color.

Those findings spilled over into my heart and have not turned loose of it. I have grown to find the centering of my life in my faith, grounded in the example of the radical, counter-cultural, tables-turning, courageous man/God named Jesus. Time and again He has shown me the better way, in stories like the Good Samaritan, the Woman at the Well, the Prodigal Son, the blind man Bartimaeus, and in speaking truth to power. He has also taught me that a reflective life is essential for grounding and re-directing when necessary.

These life and faith experiences along with the timely gift of a book, "Healing the Heart of Democracy," by Parker Palmer, have changed my life to doing what I can to advocate for social and racial justice.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, is remembered for noting, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Author Melvin Bray ("Better: Waking Up to Who We Could Be") follows this by saying, "Unless people of goodwill act in good faith toward a just end, justice will not be found. Justice, like all other virtues, is a relational challenge seeking a relational response... **Recognize the tremendous hope in this realization. The sooner we get about the business of relating more justly, the sooner justice can be found. We participate with God in making all things new.**"

I pray that we may resolve to journey together in our God-given, colorful humanity, toward a relationship of mutuality and solidarity, to **actively** bend the long arc of the moral universe toward justice.

BECOMING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

A Journey Toward Racial Justice and Inclusion



A Moment for Racial Justice

By Stephanie DeLattibeaudiere

See me...really see me. Who am I exactly? I am from a complex mix of people, races, nations, and kingdoms. I am, she, who embodies the Jamaican national motto of "Out of many one people." I am "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) and created by "...God...in His own image..." (Genesis 1:27A).

Both my maternal and paternal grandmothers are close descendants of the enslaved Africans. Talented, brave, strong, resilient people that were torn from their homeland and shackled, abused, imprisoned, and transported under horrendous conditions to a "new world."

Many Europeans, Asians, Chinese and Indians came, some as indentured servants others as free men. Among them were my great-grandfathers from France and Ireland, respectively.

Regardless of the circumstances that brought my ancestors to the "new world," they became part of a melting pot of cultures who embodied a sense of great pride. From this came a new generation of people that celebrated the ancestors and the richness of combined cultures, i.e., "the beloved community."

I immigrated to the US in 1978 to fill a registered nurse shortage and although highly skilled, I soon discovered that I had entered a culture that would judge me solely based on the color of my skin. Despite being raised with good values, my children struggle to live past the stereotypes ascribed to being black. I always remained hopeful, but learned to have "the conversations" with them while grieving and knowing that the beloved community like I grew up in, seemed farfetched for them and my grandchildren.

As people of God, we are called to be the *beloved community* (Colossians 3:12). TRUMC has made a conscious decision to work towards racial justice and inclusion. As we struggle, ponder and learn to come to grips with this "new thing," see me, and others that look like me as I see you, with spiritual eyes. Know that in the "beloved community" we are a rich complexity of immigrants and even though our stories may differ, they are all very similar.

Can you *finally* see me now?

BECOMING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

A Journey Toward Racial Justice and Inclusion



A Moment for Racial Justice

By Melanie Huggins

When I was ten, I lived in a suburb of Saint Louis. My friend Stacey across the street, wore her hair in Afro-Puffs that defied gravity and I envied fiercely. Lanky and happy Tony lived next door. His older brother played an album by a guy named *Prince* that sounded like nothing I'd ever heard before. And I, along with every third-grade girl, had a huge crush on Calvin Butler. He kept a pick in his back pocket and looked and danced like a famous teen named Michael Jackson.

One morning on the way to school, I noticed the words "Get Out" painted in black, on the side of a two-story, blue house. Kids on the bus pointed. Some laughed. But I wasn't in on the joke and all I could think was "Why would someone do that?" When I got home, I told my mother about it.

My mom—in our first memorable conversation about race—explained to me that some people didn't want black people living in our neighborhood and the people who did this were bad people. I still had questions. And as a Christian, some of her answers came directly from the bible—the difference in races as descendants of Noah's son Ham, the justification for slavery. Ten-year-old me absorbed all this information as, well, gospel.

What I'd come to grapple with later in life is that Christians have long justified and led the oppression of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). In 1841 Frederick Douglass, a Methodist, pointed out the disconnect. He said it was the "boldest of all frauds and the grossest of all libels" to claim a slaveholding America as Christian. Douglass said, "I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ."

My mom never stopped me from being friends with Stacey, or Tony or Calvin. She told me to love and respect all people. My hope for TRUMC is that we grow into a church community that is not merely passive with our love and respect, but active in our quest for equity for all people. That will mean self-reflection and honest assessment of our collective role in preventing as well as building the beloved community.

BECOMING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

A Journey Toward Racial Justice and Inclusion



A Moment for Racial Justice

by Mary Willa Roper Lowry

I grew up in the 50's and 60s in a small town in SC. Segregation was a way of life. I was fortunate that my parents who were somewhat ahead of the times raised me and my siblings to understand that white people are no different or better than blacks. I remember well during the summer before my 10th grade year when token integration was introduced in our schools, that my parents said to us it was "the right thing to do". That has stuck with me to this very day. Because of the way I was raised, integration and the Civil Rights movement were not a hard adjustment for me like they were for many people. Most people are products of their upbringing and still today there are those who struggle with prejudice.

If you are younger than 50, you can't fully understand what life was like for blacks in our country before the Civil Rights movement began to change things. We have come a long way since those days, but we still have a long way to go. As is evident by the events of the last few months, we know that inequality still exists on many levels in our country....from social injustice, to income disparities, to injustice in our court system, to lack of affordable housing, etc. Nothing changes when we ignore these injustices as if they don't exist.

I am very proud of TRUMC under Pastor Joel's leadership and guidance that we as a church have decided not to sit silently by and let things continue on as usual. I am excited about the upcoming opportunities for discussion and dialogue to help us open our minds and hearts for change so that our nation can be a nation of equality for all as was written in our constitution so many years ago. It's just "the right thing to do".

BECOMING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

A Journey Toward Racial Justice and Inclusion



A Moment for Racial Justice

By Hayes Mizell

One of the glories of the TRUMC Wednesday Morning Men's Bible Study is that we frequently discover, and rediscover, brief passages of Scripture that speak to us simply but powerfully. Such was the case when we encountered 1 Peter 3:8. "*All of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.*" This jewel is among many related Biblical treasures such as Isaiah 41:10, Luke 6:31, John 13:34-35, Romans 15:2, Galatians 6:9-10, and Colossians 3:12-14. Each of these directs us, inspires us, and challenges us. But given our sinful nature, how is it possible for us to respond faithfully? The answer, of course, is by *acting* on our belief in the word and ministry of Jesus Christ, and his sacrifice.

TRUMC will soon enter a period of introspection and dialogue that will test how seriously we take our baptismal covenant and our commitment to Scripture such as cited above. We will be learning, thinking, and talking about issues we have long ignored: racial justice and inclusion. Some TRUMC members are excited about this initiative. Some are curious. Others are apprehensive. However you approach this opportunity, "do not fear." Clothe your intentions and your actions with 1 Peter 3:8.

BECOMING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

A Journey Toward Racial Justice and Inclusion



Trenholm Road
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

A Moment for Racial Justice

By Rex Wilson

Except for high school in Virginia and graduate school in N.Y. I have always lived in the "Deep South." I grew up unaware of the tremendous blessings that my sister and I enjoyed. That realization came slowly over many years. I remember in childhood seeing the bathrooms at the Gulf station in my small home town. There was a Men's restroom and a Women's restroom and another for "coloreds." I figured it out, but the memory remains vivid and dark, and it continues to trouble me.

School began and we hardly saw black children, but there were black adults. Roberta came every day, except Sunday. She was sweet to Mitten and to me. The black men who worked for Daddy at the concrete company called me "Cowboy" and I loved them, too, especially "Salty," who took me out to the country where he taught me to hunt. In my memory other black people seemed very kind, too. I only realized later that as dear and important as they were to me in my life, I had no idea about the details of their lives.

I suffered an injury just before my ninth birthday which kept me from school. My parents found books that I would like, and I had studies to do as well. Since Roberta made sure that I didn't watch TV, I would read the books rather than study. I read and read and read. I still do and the significant changes in my life seem to be the result of reading. Perhaps this is an over-simplification, but it is through reading that my horizons have broadened and I have learned new ways to see and experience our world. I just finished *My Vanishing Country*, a thoughtful memoir by South Carolinian, Bakari Sellers, (in the TRUMC October book study). I just read *With All Due Respect*, Nicki Haley's memoir, and also Jhumba Lahiri's, *The Namesake*, about a Bengali couple in Cambridge, Massachusetts, caught between conflicting cultures. Reading promotes self-awareness and growth. During this special time my prayer is that we, the Beloved Community of TRUMC, will open our hearts and minds to reading, learning, thinking and talking.