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Making Room: Conversations About Race and Faith Between Members of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC and St. John's Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC

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MAKING ROOM: CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE AND FAITH
BETWEEN MEMBERS OF FRIENDSHIP MISSIONARY BAPTIST
CHURCH IN CHARLOTTE, NC
AND ST. JOHN'S BAPTIST CHURCH IN CHARLOTTE, NC

A PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY

BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

MARTHA DIXON KEARSE

MAY 12, 2017

APPROVAL FORM

MAKING ROOM: CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE AND FAITH
BETWEEN MEMBERS OF FRIENDSHIP MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH IN CHARLOTTE,
NC AND ST. JOHN'S BAPTIST CHURCH IN CHARLOTTE, NC

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ABSTRACT

In this project, the candidate recorded personal stories from members of two different Baptist congregations: Friendship Missionary Baptist Church (a church made up predominantly of members identifying as African-American) and St. John's Baptist Church (a church made up predominantly of members identifying as Caucasian). Using those recordings, the candidate created a podcast called "Making Room," and invited participating group members to listen to each other's stories. In addition, the candidate invited these same group members to participate in conversations about issues of race, especially as they present themselves in Charlotte, NC. The candidate and group members challenged themselves with the biblical ethic of hospitality and explored conversations about how each individual might help to improve relationships between African-Americans and Caucasian Americans using that Christian ethic.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

In any given time period, it is the job of people of faith to carry out, to the best of their ability, the call of God to be in community with each other. While prohibitions abound to inform us that it is not our business to judge those who have come before us, (Mt. 7:1), an equal number of admonitions let us know that it is our job to assess and correct any wrongs of the past, to make apologies where necessary, and to do the difficult work of inclusion that is so clearly outlined in the scriptures. In his article outlining the necessity for Christians to offer hospitality to refugees and asylum seekers, Ross Langmead calls on an expanded definition of the Hebrew word, *יָשָׁא* or *yasha*, which is generally translated as “salvation.” Brown-Driver-Briggs defines this word, in its Niphal form, as “make wide, spacious,” or “make sufficient,”¹ and Langmead says, “*yasha* carries the meaning of bringing us into a spacious environment, free us from narrow or cramped existence, and this sense of making room, or creating space is part of all dimensions of hospitality.”² Along with many other theologians, Langmead regards the work of offering Christian hospitality as “fundamentally a response to our experience of God, ‘gifting and honoring human beings with the super-abundant hospitality of God.’”³ Despite the essential and basic nature of a theology of hospitality to the Christian faith, despite the pervasive presence of explicit instructions and themes of hospitality throughout the Old and the New Testaments, hospitality as an element of faith is a subject rarely offered in sermons or in worship, and even more rarely represented as paradigmatic for Christians in the public sphere.

¹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 8th ed., (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 446.

² Ross Langmead, “Refugees as Guests and Hosts: Toward a Theology of Mission Among Refugees and Asylum Seekers,” *Exchange* 43, no. 1 (2014), 37.

³ Langmead, 37.

Nowhere has the Christian church failed at hospitality more spectacularly than in the persistent racism of American Christians. The very foundations of many churches originate in an angry, defiant racism, leading people identifying as “white” to break away from national associations, and leading to the creation of churches for people identifying as “black,” because they were not welcomed in the white churches. In 2016, the system of white and black churches is so deeply entrenched in our culture that most people, including clergy and laity of both black and white churches, regard the situation as hopelessly intractable and do little work to heal the rift between individuals who would all identify themselves as Christians.

Using the biblical theme of hospitality as an anchor for the call to community, the model of acceptance, and the importance, in the kingdom of God, for the work toward acceptance, I led a project of conversation between members from two churches in Charlotte, NC: Friendship Missionary Baptist Church (hereafter FMBC), with a predominantly African-American congregation, and St. John’s Baptist Church (hereafter SJBC), with a predominantly Caucasian congregation. Over the course of several weeks, this project offered these congregations the opportunity to hear each other’s stories, to enter into dialogue, and to make room for each other in their concepts of the community of the people of God.

CHAPTER 2: DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Why the Project is Needed

As I mentioned above, the primary reasons that this project is needed in my setting is that it is well past time that white churches, such as ours, have these conversations, and my church, SJBC, has indicated both readiness and intentionality on the topic of racial reconciliation. This reasoning goes beyond mere social mores and civil rights, although it is inclusive of both of those. Believing this issue of division and exclusion (whether it is because of race or gender or sexual identity) to be at the very heart of what stymies and destroys the modern church, I have felt called, for many years, to focus some piece of my work as a minister on this issue. The central biblical theme behind this call is that of hospitality, which, it turns out, involves more than turning the kettle on when guests show up.

Statement of Problem

Because it has been my experience that little forward movement has happened, during the fifteen years I have been a minister, in the area of racial understanding, even between the members of different racial identities who all identify as Christians, I consider this project to be both necessary and urgent. In 2016, we continue, as a country, to incarcerate young black men at astonishing rates, rates which, Michelle Alexander points out, are higher than South Africa did, even in the midst of a policy of Apartheid.⁴ We have many angry young people who live with daily injustices, like being pulled over for “Driving While Black,” or who risk being shot by their own policemen for things for which white young people would not even get a slap on the wrist. In addition, we continue to participate in what is widely acknowledged as the “most segregated hour in America,” forty years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. first noted it.⁵

⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Revised Edition (New York: The New Press, 2012), 7.

⁵ Dan Harris and Blair Soden, “Segregated Sundays: Taking on Race and Religion,” accessed March 31, 2016ABCNews.go.com.

In creating solid communities, churches often also create silos, where what is going on in “our” church becomes all we know about, all we care about, and all we perceive on our life horizons. This fact makes ecumenical work, inter-religious work, and inter-racial work very difficult and means that any forward movement in any of those areas requires intentionality on the parts of all involved. Last year, after the horrific shootings in Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, the senior pastor here at St. John’s Baptist Church reached out to the senior pastor at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, also here in Charlotte. Between them, they decided to sponsor some opportunities for dialogue and community between the members of the two churches. Several events have been held, all of which have been well-attended and well-led. Because that ground work has been laid over the past year, working with FMBC seemed like a great way to approach these issues, as they have indicated, along with SJBC, a readiness and an intentionality in approaching these issues.

Having attended a training program for racial justice in Ferguson, MO in 2015, I continued my own process of coming to understand the depth of our responsibilities for working toward racial reconciliation. In particular, I learned some realities that people of color deal with on a daily basis from white people. For example, the way that white privilege pervades our existence. When a room has a racially diverse make-up, the white people who speak expect to be heard; often, white people take over the conversation and expect their opinions and authority to be accepted.⁶ Not only did I find this to be true of myself while I was in the training in Ferguson, but I found it very difficult to counter in myself, and had to constantly monitor my need to tell the young people I was working with the “right” way to do things and to make them respect me and my experience over their own opinions. It is my experience that white people have a very hard time being quiet when opinions have been solicited and just listening respectfully, without correction, to other people’s ideas and experiences.

⁶ “Coming to Ferguson: Building a Nonviolent Movement,” Deep Abiding Love Project of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, accessed July 2015, <http://forusa.org>.

Interestingly, one issue the white church has been notoriously silent on is that of racial injustice. Although there is much evidence that most churches were not actively violent or vicious or interested in perpetrating the horrors of slavery or Jim Crow or voting rights violations or shooting young black men in the streets, there is ample evidence that the church has avoided speaking out against these injustices, and has protected itself from the controversial positions by remaining absolutely silent. In *Kingdom Ethics*, David Gushee and Glen Stassen have this to say about racial reconciliation:

More precisely, we want to argue that both biblically and in the context of Historic patterns of racial injustice in the United States, the concept of reconciliation is empty of content unless it is built upon the sturdy foundation of justice...There can be no racial reconciliation unless there is first the redress of race-based or race-linked injustice, just as there can generally be no reconciliation between alienated persons or groups until or unless previous and current wrongs are constructively addressed.⁷

If, as Gushee and Stassen claim, the church must address injustice in order for reconciliation to occur, then it stands to reason that the white church will need to first listen to members of the African-American community in order to find out what the injustices are and how we should begin to make amends for them.

In the current movements for racial equality and racial justice in America, one prevalent saying is “White silence equals violence;” the movement is aware that silence in the face of injustice implies consent. White America, including the vast number of White Christians included in White America, continues to give silent consent to the murder of African-American males and females. Instead of the language of racial epithets, White America now uses the language of “thugs” and “gangsters.” The deep-seated belief of White Americans in the Meritocracy—that is, that people get what they deserve—means that anyone stopped by the police must have been doing something to deserve being stopped by the police; it means that anyone arrested by the police must have been breaking the law; it means that anyone shot by the

⁷ Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 390.

police must have been threatening that policeman's life. The White American belief system has no place for the possibility that there exist policemen who act out of fear or out of poor training or out of personal bias. It has no place for the possibility of true injustice. It does not recognize the body lying in the street for four and half hours after having been shot six times, despite having been unarmed, as the body of one of our children.

Despite the fact that White Christians have had plenty of energy to spend arguing with each other and propping up politicians, they have spent little or no visible effort in even exploring the possibility that what the African-American community has been saying about the injustice in its community could be 100% true. There has been no outcry for investigation from the white community, no concerted outreach into the systemic injustice of schools and divided neighborhoods, and certainly no comprehensive effort from the members of white churches to explore their own privilege. "Implicit Bias," a term which has come out of the new movements of recent years, is a term which explores what it means to have privileges about which a person is unaware, but from which a person gains advantage over others.

For example, a white person may think that he or she has earned their lovely house. Certainly, they did the work for their pay check; certainly, they paid their mortgage bills each month. What that white person ignores is that his or her parents owned their home—they were able to get loans and to buy in any neighborhood they wished. Subsequently, those parents were able to support their children until those children were able to pay their own way—the parents may have paid for college, or helped with the down-payment on a house, or allowed the child to live rent-free in their house as a young adult so they could save money. No systems have stood in the way of that white person's progress; particularly for a white male, no systems have impeded his upward mobility. He may have advanced with hard work and skill, but he did so by having an inherent advantage the whole time: there were no systems working against him.

Even reading this passage, my guess is that white readers feel automatic resistance. It is incredibly difficult to admit that we did not earn everything we have in a clean, unbiased

fashion. Unfortunately, that even playing field is a myth. If anyone would like to know whether or not he or she has had a statistical, systemic advantage over another group, it is a simple matter of looking at earning power. If the playing field were even, white males and black males should, statistically, be able to earn about the same amount of money; if the playing field were even, males and females should, statistically, be able to earn about the same amount of money. In actuality, African-Americans are far less likely to own a home, which is the greatest stepping stone to stable wealth in America. Statistics on earning power show a hierarchy where white males are, by far, the highest earners in the country, followed by white females (who, though second, earn significantly less than white males), then black males, and then black females, with Hispanic females earning less than both groups.⁸ A study from Bard College refers to the “feminization of poverty” and explains that

minority women are at greater risk of falling into poverty than either minority men or white women. Recent data on poverty rates in the United States indicate that black, Native American, and Hispanic women are disproportionately represented among the poor, and several studies have pointed to a need to study the distinct patterns and origins of women’s poverty across both racial and ethnic line.⁹

White Christians have not only been silent on these issues, we have been complicit in propping up the status quo. The foray of the Christian right into politics in the 1980’s set up a pattern that exists to this day, wherein coded racism was permitted in public policy-making (think “welfare queens”). And, lest the progressives think themselves excused, the absence of any voice recognizing injustices in incarceration and state sanctioned execution has given those policy makers *carte blanche* to move forward with three strikes laws, with neighborhood watch laws, with the militarization of local police and with an increasingly fearful narrative about African-American males and the danger they present to the society.

⁸Pew Research Center. “Racial Gender Wage Gaps Persist in US Despite Some Progress,” accessed January 23, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/01/racial-gender-wage-gaps-persist-in-u-s-despite-some-progress/>.

⁹ Yuval Elmelech and Hsien-Hen Lu, *Race, Ethnicity and the Gender-Poverty Gap*, Abstract p. 1, accessed January 23, 2017 <http://www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/wp351.pdf>.

If Christians are to make any progress in helping move their communities forward in race relations, we must first recognize the harm we have caused and do a relentless personal search for our own sins of silence and implicit bias. We must do the work of repentance to which we are called in the Bible for failing utterly in the vital tasks of hospitality we have been given. We have not offered protection—not physical, not emotional, not spiritual. We have not welcomed the outsider with loving kindness, with food and shelter, and with efforts to supply their needs. We have ignored the widows and orphans—we have, in fact, been complicit in causing more families to be widowed and orphaned—and we have left Jesus hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and in prison again and again and again and again. Our harm is an egregious one, and an ongoing one. Most significantly, it is a harm that we cannot begin to remedy until we have acknowledged our sin, and we have yet to do so.

The Purpose of the Project

The effort of this project is not merely to give African-Americans and Caucasian Americans a chance to dialogue about what they can do together. The primary goal of this project is to help White Christians to confront our own part in the sins of our people; to help White Christians take ownership of our own biases, our own privilege and our own sins of complicity; and to begin a conversation about the ways in which each of us can begin to right those wrongs. This project aims to start that process at one church, SJBC, with the help of African-Americans from FMBC, in the hopes that having a shared faith history and a common theology will help the White Christians to be able to really listen to what African-Americans are telling us about themselves.

My experiment, then, is to find ways to end that silence and to open up dialogue between members of a predominantly white church and members of a predominantly African-American church and inside the system of the white church. It is my theory that, starting with a foundation of a shared faith and shared faith experiences (such as common elements of church ritual, practice and message during childhood years), and having agreed to address the issues of race

with intentionality, individuals from these two churches have a better chance at having conversations that are productive than perhaps they would have in other settings.

As a first step toward truly working to right wrongs and address injustice, this project provided the opportunity for people to hear each other and learn from each other. As a further part of this process, I recorded, from each individual from both churches, three different stories: a childhood story, a story of his or her faith journey, and a story in which the individual encountered issues of race. I collected these recordings and created a podcast, called “Making Room.”

Our first meeting included setting ground rules and setting up our process, including a practice conversation. At this point, individuals were given the link to the podcast where the personal stories were posted, and were asked to listen to the stories as often as possible over the period during which we are meeting. Because so many of the training exercises, including the “Do Not Be Afraid” seminar I took in March of 2016 from the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, advocate a process of listening without commenting, it was my hope that, as these individuals heard each other’s stories, their willingness to listen to each other in our dialogue process would, as would their willingness to consider the possibility that their own perspective was not the only true perspective.

Original Proposal

The project proposal, as stated to Friendship Missionary Baptist Church and St. John’s Baptist Church, is outlined as follows (the future tense in these passages reflects the exact wording sent to SJBC and FMBC):

Proposal for Friendship Missionary Baptist Church and St. John’s Baptist Church

Hypothesis: That having a shared faith experience and the opportunity to share personal stories, people will be able to have more effective and satisfactory conversations on the difficult issues of race in our culture than they would if those things were not present. That as they begin to hear each other’s stories and to become cognizant of their shared faith, group members will grow

more able to express their true opinions, to discuss difficult topics and to gain trust in the process of discussion.

People: 10-15 members of FMBC to join with 10-15 members of St. John's Baptist Church for 5 sessions. Each willing member will record three stories before the sessions begin, including one story from their childhood, one story of their walk of faith, and one story in which they dealt with issues of race or racial identity.

Sessions: The 5 sessions will be held at a time to be agreed upon by the group (this will likely be a week night). The sessions will last no longer than 1 ½ hours (except for the first session, which will include a ½ hour introduction time) and will be held, alternately, at FMBC and SJBC. Each session will include the discussion of a topic regarding race, such as ongoing discrimination (voting rights, employment, educational opportunities), the justice system and disproportionate incarceration of African-American men, the Black Lives Matter movement, and at least one topic chosen by the group.

Evaluation: Each member of the group will be asked to complete an evaluation after each meeting. Evaluations will be completed online or in print and can be done anonymously. Evaluations will ask group members to evaluate the conversation, their levels of stress or anxiety during the conversation, their sense of the effectiveness of the conversation, and their ongoing sense of the value of the exercise.

Timing: Those willing to record their stories will make their recordings during **June, July or August of 2016**. Martha Kearse can come to FMBC or SJBC to make digital recordings, or those who have access to a smart phone or digital recorder can make their own recordings. Sessions will be held **in late September and early October of 2016**. Specific dates during that time period will be decided on by the group.

Communication: Those willing to be in the group will need to have access to email and a willingness to check for communications by email. They will need internet access and the ability

to listen to digital stories. Accommodations can be made for listening to stories on CD, but communication will largely be through email.

Leadership: Rev. Martha Kears (Associate Pastor at St. John's Baptist Church) is conducting this project for her Doctorate of Ministry Project through Gardner-Webb University. Martha will be present at each session to facilitate discussion. Any minister on staff at FMBC is welcome to come to any session, and to take leadership of some of the sessions if he or she wishes to do so. The group will begin the first session by deciding on protocols for discussion and "rules of engagement" in the discussion sessions. These rules, as decided by the group, will be strictly enforced throughout all sessions.

Results: All results and published writings about this project will be available to members of FMBC and members of SJBC. All identities will be protected throughout the publication process.

Project Setting

St. John's Baptist Church, where I am Associate Pastor, has a long history of approaching the issue of race in our culture. As early as the 1940's, St. John's went through the process of officially opening its membership to African-Americans. Led by Dr. Claude Broach, the church took on the issue with little rancor and led the city in making membership in the previously all-white church available to all races. According to long-time member and Deacon Emeritus Tom Peacock, however, "We weren't as cute as we thought we were." In other words, there was no influx of African-American members either at that time or subsequently.

In the 1990's, under the leadership of Dr. Richard Kremer, SJBC helped to create the United Baptist Association in Charlotte, which was a collection of predominantly white churches and predominantly black churches who agreed to work together on several projects. St. John's, Park Road Baptist, Sardis Baptist and Wedgewood Baptist represented the white churches, while Greater Mount Sinai and St. Paul's Baptist were the primary African-American churches. Together, these churches built Hope Chapel, a church for homeless people, ran a summer Bible school program for almost a decade, and offered an annual Martin Luther King Day service, in

which one church hosted and provided the choir, and a minister from another church offered the sermon. The UBA lasted about a decade, until, one-by-one, the churches removed their participation and support. At no time did this effort lead to a significant growth in the number of African-Americans at SJBC.

Over the course of my tenure at SJBC, which began in 2001 when I came on staff as the Minister to Children and Families, I have, at times, made efforts to reach out to African-American churches for partnership, or to offer programs which might be more welcoming to African-Americans. While I think it can be said that St. John's may have succeeded in projecting the message that we would not be hostile to members who do not identify as white, what I have come to understand is that the culture of the church has not changed one iota in order to make people who are not just like the rest of us feel welcomed. Everything about the church, from the whiteness of the ministers to the hymns we sing and the way we preach is exclusively and utterly white. When a disastrous attempt was made to create an "African-American" alternative worship service, the effort was both so paternalistic in its intent (invoking such things as the "authenticity" of African-American worship) and so exclusive of any input from actual people of color in its planning that it died, deservedly, before it ever got off the ground.

SJBC is probably not guilty of the sin of intentional exclusion; what it is guilty of, however, is a pervasive and overwhelming paternalism, rising out of a sense of duty and wealth which, in SJBC's morality, carries great responsibility. Currently, we do have some African-American members; we installed our first two African-American deacons last fall. This installation, however, says more about the determined hard work and grace of the African-American people who continue to show up at a service which is not able to offer them pieces of their own culture than it does about the work of the rest of the people of SJBC.

SJBC is particularly guilty of the sin of silence. As is true of most church-goers, the members of SJBC are, for the most part, rule-followers. Although many elements of Christianity involve following rules, an equal number involve evaluating the rules of the culture and

responding to injustice, a task rule-followers find difficult to do. Most members of SJBC remain silent on issues of race primarily because those issues do not intersect with their daily lives enough to overcome their inherent need to live inside the systems as they currently exist. Because they are not required by the facts of their lives to confront the realities of race every day, most members of SJBC do not do so.

My interest, then, is in helping the people of SJBC move to the next level of inclusion, preparing them with a sense of openness to make room, to offer space and safety and welcome, to people who may express themselves differently, or who may value things differently than they do. My hope has been to help the White Christians who are members of SJBC to truly absorb the idea that African-American men, women and children are their brothers and sisters, and, as such, deserve equal and just treatment. My goal was to help the people of SJBC learn to listen, learn to trust and respect opinions which are not their own, learn to quiet their own voices in the room, and learn to speak up to each other in defense of those who have been held on the outside. In addition, it has been my hope that this project provides some of the ground work for collaboration and true relationship with the staff and members of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. I continue to hope for a relationship that is beneficial to FMBC, one in which the people of SJBC are able to be listeners and followers, and one which gives us opportunities to receive.

Discussion Groups

In the spring, when I proposed this project, SJBC and FMBC were already engaged in a discussion with each other and with Providence Baptist Church (PBC) about programs we could have which furthered the cause of racial understanding. We had already had a concert (The Power of Song), and a lecture on Charlotte neighborhoods with Tom Hanchett and were planning further projects. After my proposal had already been submitted, FMBC posted that they would have a series of three community conversations: one on July 31st , one on September 25th and one on October 30th .

I attended the program in July called “Strengthening the Bonds of Trust,” along with several members from SJBC—many of whom later agreed to work on my project with me. The program included a panel of several city officials, including the Chief of Police, two educators, and a few other civic leaders. The meeting room was full, with an estimated crowd of between 250 and 275. The panel members each spoke briefly about who they were and what work they were doing in the community, and then the crowd was broken up into groups. Interestingly, having concerns about the safety of group members and group leaders, the planners of the event had not felt comfortable sending groups out of the room, so each group had to discuss the topics with each other inside the fellowship hall where we were meeting. This made discussion difficult.

One of my friends, who is a former CMS teacher, sat next to another former CMS teacher from FMBC. While we could not hear every comment, the two of them agreed on many of the things they thought were important, including more interaction and support from the churches for the schools and students in them. We were asked to discuss action points: what should we be doing to help race relations in the city to move forward? What actions can we take right now? The older people tended to talk about accountability, and making sure that we were supporting existing systems so they could do their work. The younger people asked for the support of the older people, especially in terms of advocacy and even protest.

I was allowed to hand out my fliers at this meeting and invite people to be part of my project. Several people expressed an interest (although none followed through in the subsequent weeks after this meeting). Knowing that FMBC planned two more of these meetings, I decided to incorporate them into my project, asking those willing to do the project to attend the September and October meetings, along with two other discussion meetings with just our group. This way, two of the discussion sessions would be planned and led by FMBC and, more importantly, by African-American people. They would set the agenda, not me, and the members of SJBC who attended would be, primarily, listeners. It was my hope that using those two meetings at FMBC

would help members from FMBC to feel safer and to trust that I was willing to be a listener myself.

Change #1: Instead of four or five discussion sessions with just the project group, all led by MDK, two of the meetings simply involved attendance at the FMBC “Strengthening the Bonds of Trust” series; the other two were held at SJBC and would be led by MDK.

Amendment:

The group did attend the “Strengthening the Bonds of Trust” meeting in September, the results of which are in the report on that date. In October, the FMBC meeting was scheduled for Oct. 30th. Ten SJBC Members went to FMBC that evening to attend the program and found that it had been cancelled without notice to our group. Instead, we returned to SJBC and held an impromptu discussion session led by MDK.

Conversation with Rev. Michelle Jones

In late August, after having sent out numerous invitations to members of FMBC, including fliers and an all-church email from Rev. Jones, I asked her if she would allow me to buy her lunch and talk with her about the project. We met at Showmar’s on 7th Street. Rev. Jones has been working with our senior pastor, Dr. Dennis Foust, and with the associate pastor at Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte, Dr. David Jordan, on a program for our three churches to work together on racial harmony. I sensed some frustration from her on this issue and we talked some about that process. She is also working on her doctorate and we talked about that process for a while. When she asked me what it was I needed to talk with her about, I began to tell her what I was learning about my project.

“I am wondering,” I said, “if it would help if I changed the way I am doing this project.”

“In what way?” she asked

“Well, what I am realizing is that I am asking a lot of your members. They don’t know me, and they don’t know whether I am trustworthy or not.”

She nodded.

“I’m realizing that talking about this in front of white people is also potentially traumatic—what if someone says something truly hurtful? What if they have to remember things that happened that were hurtful?”

She said, “That’s true,” not looking at me and clearly not wanting to be confrontational.

“It has also occurred to me that they may have had these discussions before and found the white people unwilling to listen,” I said.

We talked some about the difficulties white people had being listeners in the room and our propensity for taking over the conversation, and we agreed that this made it very difficult for black people to see any advantage in going to yet another discussion group on the issue of race.

I asked her, “What if I just ask people to record their stories? They can come to be part of the discussion groups if they want, but if they do not want to discuss these issues, they can simply allow us to listen to their stories.”

Rev. Jones said, “They might feel more comfortable with that.” We talked about how that could protect their privacy and give them control over the amount of feedback they received from anyone who might hear their stories.

One thing I noticed as the conversation continued was that Rev. Jones met my eye more often as we talked. Over the last few years of beginning to learn to listen, I have consciously started to practice shutting up. The spiritual discipline of shutting up involves calming that voice which says, “I have a great idea! My idea is really, really good! If everyone will just do my idea, we’ll all be better off!” This spiritual discipline involves remembering how important it is to not get my way and to truly attend to the way someone else wants to do things. It involves giving up being right (or the perception that I am right) and opening myself to the rightness of other people around me. Practicing that spiritual discipline here—valuing the theology of hospitality which says that one of the primary jobs of hospitality is protection, opened a small window with Rev. Jones. She is a person with a great smile, a witty sense of humor and a warm presence; she

also strikes me as very private and perhaps skeptical of the value of yet another conversation about race with white people who are not really listening and have no plans to change their own behavior. It seemed to me that, at the end of this conversation, I had done one thing right: I had paid attention to the feedback I was getting, evaluated it accurately, and amended my process in favor of the protection of her people. And so, my project changed again in this way:

Change #2: Participants from FMBC were asked to complete surveys, to complete the Project Implicit test, and to record their stories; while they were invited to participate in group discussions, they were able to choose whether or not they attend. Their attendance was not assumed as part of their participation in the project.

September in Charlotte

Charlotte, despite its lack of violent protests or riots over the past several years, has not been a progressive force in the movement toward racial equality. In a program on May 17th, 2016 at SJBC, with members from SJBC, FMBC, PBC and the public in attendance, Tom Hanchett, a local historian, outlined the egregious harms perpetrated on African-Americans in Charlotte over the last 116 years in Charlotte. If all of the travesties visited on African-Americans in Charlotte were listed here, the paper would be able to explore nothing else. For the purposes of understanding the specific harms in Charlotte visited by the white community and the wealthy community on African-Americans (simultaneous with harms visited on poor people of all pigments), the main issues Hanchett lined were these:

- In 1875 Charlotte was not segregated by race or by economic status;
- In the period after the Civil War, poor whites and poor blacks joined in a “fusion” of power in the Republican party to vote out the wealthy who had held power;
- In the 1890’s an economic downturn and the loss of their powerful seats of leadership made the wealthy look for tactics to divide the “fusion;”
- White leadership quickly went to work to demonize African-Americans and to remove voting rights (poll taxes, literacy tests, propaganda—See Figure 2);

- Red-Lining became a federal program of approval for banks to invest in certain neighborhoods and to refuse loans in “bad” neighborhoods, specifically those with African-Americans and immigrants;
- GI Bill gave low interest mortgages to white veterans, but African-American veterans were refused access;
- The African-American neighborhood, Brooklyn, was overtaken by whites requiring 1000 people to be displaced from their homes, businesses closed (most of which never re-opened), and over a dozen churches moved out of the neighborhood;
- Communities like Myers Park were created as gated communities, with the clear purpose of providing space for wealthy whites to live while keeping out African-Americans and poor whites.

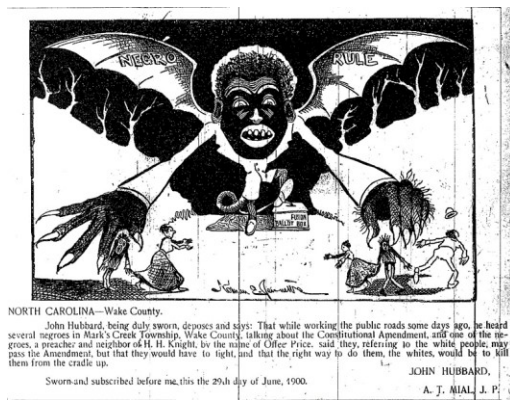


Figure 1—From the front page of the Raleigh News and Observer in June 1900¹⁰

A specific incident that Hanchett describes is particularly memorable: on a float in a parade just before the election of 1900, an African-American is standing at a ballot box—beside him are white men holding a gun to his head. The intentional demonizing of African-American males is illustrated in the cartoon from the Raleigh News and Observer of that year (Figure 1). Hanchett showed an image of a map of Charlotte from 2016, showing where people live based on race and economics: the wedge of wealthy whites is to the south and the north of the city; the crescent of poorer whites and African-Americans goes around the center of the city with very

¹⁰ Tom Hanchett, “Segregation to Salad Bowl: Race in Charlotte Neighborhoods,” lecture on May 17, 2016 at St. John’s Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC.

clear lines of demarcation between the two. Charlotte is a divided city and was made so, intentionally, over the last 100 years.¹¹

In addition to its entrenched segregation in neighborhoods, Charlotte has become increasingly segregated in its schools. In the 1990's it re-instituted the desegregation of its schools in a re-opening of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools*, the 1972 landmark decision which had mandated the desegregation of schools in Charlotte. Prior to that, CMS had some exemplary schools, East Mecklenburg HS and West Charlotte HS to name two, which had made tremendous strides in mastering diversity and at which bussing had helped to create thriving academic communities for students from all areas of Charlotte. The re-opening of the case, brought by six white families, led to an examination of the still deeply entrenched distinctions between what African-American students were offered through CMS and what white students received.¹² After the re-segregation of Charlotte, poverty in Charlotte became more deeply entrenched in certain neighborhoods. Title I schools began to serve populations that were 98% free and reduced lunch and middle-class white students could once again go to schools where they rarely, if ever, encountered African-American students in their classes. In a study conducted by researchers at Harvard University, Mecklenburg County was found to be, "In terms of income inequality, among the 5 percent of worst counties" and found that children who grow up poor in Mecklenburg County have a high likelihood of remaining so.¹³

Finally, as if these realities of history and economics were not enough, Keith Lamontt Scott was shot and killed by a Charlotte police officer on September 20th, 2016. That night, protesters took to the streets of Charlotte, creating the first angry mobs Charlotte has seen in the

¹¹ Hanchett, 2016.

¹² Katherine Chamblee, "Progressing Backward: The Re-Opening of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools*," accessed Jan. 23rd, 2017, <http://www.swarthmore.edu/writing/progressing-backward-re-opening-swann-v-charlotte-mecklenburg-schools>.

¹³ Marshal Terry and Michael Tomsic, "New Research Shows Mecklenburg County Among Worst for Economic Mobility," accessed Jan. 23rd, 2017, <http://wfae.org/post/new-research-shows-mecklenburg-county-among-worst-economic-mobility>, from May 6, 2015.

30 years of my residence here. On the day after the shooting, the Charlotte Clergy Coalition for Justice, of which I am a member, was contacted by groups planning to lead a protest march that night, and asked to invite clergy to be present for the protest, to provide a calm presence in the crowd. Along with about 30 other clergy, I responded to the call and went to the Little Rock AME Zion Church on McDowell and 7th Street to get instructions. We were asked to put a yellow ribbon around our arms to indicate that we were clergy and to walk with the crowd. Again, this report is not the place to outline the entire event, but the following are my observations of that event, having followed it in its entirety up to the use of tear gas on the crowd by the police:

- The crowd gathered at Marshall Park, made up largely of African-Americans, but also of some Caucasians, including clergy;
- The crowd at Marshall Park was determined and angry, but not violent;
- The crowd marched to Little Rock AME Zion, accompanied by police on bikes;
- At Little Rock, many in the crowd began to question why they would gather at a church and decided to move to the police station;
- The crowd moved to the police station—increasingly angry, but still non-violent;
- At the police station, the crowd began to talk of moving to the EpiCenter, just up Trade St.—at this point, most of the clergy had dispersed;
- At the EpiCenter, most people began just walking around talking to each other—some moved into the EpiCenter—some vandalism began happening, but still no violence;
- Within minutes, the police came down Trade St. in full riot gear and the crowd moved to respond—the police were armed with tear gas, pellet guns, and batons;
- The clergy were asked to stand between the police and the protesters, which we did; as the police moved back up the street toward the Omni Hotel, the clergy stayed in between them and the people; the crowd followed them;
- When the police turned into the Omni parking deck, some of the crowd followed and the police fired tear gas into the crowd—at that point, the crowd, though loud and angry, had shown no signs of violence; police continued to fire tear gas and rubber bullets into the crowd;
- Protesters continued to stay in the streets and to confront police, but I witnessed no violent acts toward police; there were acts of vandalism elsewhere downtown.

Change #3—Recognizing a certain amount of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, both in myself and in many of the possible participants, the participants were offered much more flexibility in their attendance at meetings and the individual meeting surveys were removed from the project.

Final Form of the Project

Hypothesis: That having a shared faith experience and the opportunity to share personal stories, people were able to have more effective and satisfactory conversations on the difficult issues of race in our culture than they would if those things were not present. That as they begin to hear each other's stories and to become cognizant of their shared faith, group members grew more able to express their true opinions, to discuss difficult topics and to gain trust in the process of discussion.

People: Some members of FMBC (as many as possible) to join with 10-15 members of St. John's Baptist Church for the project. FMBC members were encouraged to record three stories, including one story from their childhood, one story of their walk of faith, and one story in which they dealt with issues of race or racial identity. FMBC members were invited to participate in discussion groups, but were not required to do so for the purposes of the project. SJBC members were asked to record three stories, including one story from their childhood, one story of their walk of faith, and one story in which they dealt with issues of race or racial identity. SJBC members were asked to participate in four discussion sessions: September 25, "Strengthening the Bonds of Trust #2," at FMBC; October 19 at SJBC; October 30, "Strengthening the Bonds of Trust #3," at FMBC; November 19 at SJBC, final session. All participants were asked to listen to as many stories as possible from their fellow participants.

Sessions: The sessions were held at a time agreed upon by the group or at the announced time of the FMBC programs. The sessions lasted no longer than 1 1/2 hours and were held at FMBC and SJBC. Sessions included some instruction on helpful terms, such as "implicit bias,"

“meritocracy,” and “privilege,” along with opportunities for discussion on observed patterns, questions, difficulties and possible actions going forward.

Evaluation: Each member of the group was asked to complete an initial survey and a final survey, as well as completing the Project Implicit test on Racial Preference.¹⁴ Evaluations were completed online or in print and could be done anonymously. Evaluations asked group members to evaluate the value of conversation, their sense of the effectiveness of the conversation, the challenges and rewards of the conversation, and their ongoing sense of the value of the exercise.

Timing: Those willing to record their stories made their recordings during September and October. Martha Kearse came to FMBC or SJBC to make digital recordings. Sessions were held between September 25 and November 19.

Communication: Those willing to be in the group needed to have access to email and a willingness to check for communications by email. They needed internet access and the ability to listen to digital stories. Accommodations were made for listening to stories on CD, but communication was largely made through email.

Leadership: Rev. Martha Kearse (Associate Pastor at St. John’s Baptist Church) conducted this project for her Doctorate of Ministry Project through Gardner-Webb University. Martha was present at each session to facilitate discussion. Any minister on staff at FMBC was welcome to come to any session, and was invited to take leadership of some of the sessions if he or she wished to do so, although none did. The group began the first session by deciding on protocols for discussion and “rules of engagement” in the discussion sessions. These rules, as decided by the group, were strictly enforced throughout all sessions.

Results: All results and published writings about this project will be available to members of FMBC and members of SJBC. All identities were protected throughout the publication process.

¹⁴ Project Implicit Racial Preference Test, accessed September 3, 2016, <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/Study?tid=-1>.

Hospitality Moments

After gaining an understanding of the need to prioritize the safety of participants, both African-American and Caucasian, I made several efforts in service of the protection of my participants, including paying attention to the “ask” of the project, securing private spaces, and significant attention to the tone of every encounter. I have already expressed the difficulties of including members from FMBC, where, despite the members’ trust of their own ministry staff, the cultural mistrust (and, frankly, experience) of white people was such that it was difficult to find members who would actually participate in the project. In order to build trust with those members, I made the following efforts:

- Attended the “Strengthening the Bonds of Trust” seminars, acting as a facilitator at the September 25th gathering;
- Attended a senior adult Bible study, staying afterward to talk with members about possible participation in the project;
- Gathered members of SJBC to help sort clothes which FMBC had collected to send to Baton Rouge, LA for flood relief at FMBC;
- Changed requirements of project participation for FMBC members;
- Met FMBC participants at FMBC to do recordings in private room.

For SJBC members, the safety issues were just as real, but generated from a different place and requiring different solutions. With the members of SJBC, it was necessary to be part of telling them some terrible news, namely that we had all been complicit in systems that were continuing to harm people based on their race. In the language of the Black Lives Matter movement, this is called being “woke up,” and it is a deeply painful process which involves a relentless search of the self for guilt and repentance. In order to call the members of my church to this work, I needed to be able to assure them that I would not be standing outside of the system, judging them; that they would have the space they needed to come to terms with their own truth; and that there would be grace on the other side of the conversations. In order to provide for their safety, I did the following:

- Had multiple, individual conversations with members about what participation in the project would look like;
- Had multiple, individual conversations with members during the project about what they were experiencing and how to process those feelings;
- Offered constant reassurance, in each meeting, that the individuals in the project were not being asked to bear the burden of 400 years of slavery and oppression, but were being asked to focus on their own sphere of influence, their own complicity, and their own power for change.
- Provided private space for recordings and for discussion sessions.

During the course of the project, one SJBC member, SJ1, expressed doubts about his ability to continue the project. In our October 19 session, one of the terms we defined was “White fragility,” or the tendency of those with privilege to be overly sensitive to any implication that they are doing wrong. SJ1 called me to express that he was experiencing that sense of fragility and could not continue with the project. We met over a meal and discussed what he was feeling at length, exploring the realities and the painfulness of accepting those realities, such as the reality that racism remains a systemic, persistent problem in the US, and is not just an isolated incident here and there related to “bad apples.” We also explored the issues he was not being asked to carry: neither the enormous sins of the past, about which we can do nothing except offer repentance, nor the violent racism of others. We talked about becoming aware of things which are under our control, such as our acknowledgement of injustice and our voice calling out for justice on behalf of others. SJ 1 was not the only member to suffer during this process, but became, for me, a beautiful example of someone honestly taking on this issue to the best of his/her ability.

Since the topic we were going to be discussing was so difficult, and since it had been so hard to find people who were willing to be part of this project, I made every effort to ensure that people felt welcomed into the process. I did this primarily through the cunning use of food. For our first meeting at SJBC, I bought dinner for the group from a nearby restaurant called Soul

Central, which had recently opened on Central Avenue, close to my house. Although this food ended up being fairly expensive (around \$200), it was well worth the money for several reasons:

1. I met the owner, Chef David, who brought our food to the church himself and seemed to greatly appreciate the business, and so made a new friend in Charlotte;
2. The food was very good, and was the kind of food that everyone could enjoy;
3. We began the evening talking about the food, and the atmosphere of the room was friendly before we began talking about more difficult topics.

At the meeting that actually took place at FMBC, and at the one which was supposed to take place there, but ended up at SJBC, I did not provide food. While we were still able to have the discussions, obviously, I will say that we missed those moments that come when people are filling plates and talking small talk. For the last meeting, on November 19th, I cooked the food for the group. We had homemade shrimp salad, cheese and crackers, homemade gingerbread cookies, dabo (a South Sudanese fried dough), and options of cider, coffee or water. This time, we ate after our discussion, which offered some moments of quiet conversation before we ended our time together.

In addition to the food, I tried to make sure everyone was kept up to date on all the timings, places and information for our meetings. These details became a fairly constant part of my daily work, as I also needed to be in individual contact with members to arrange for private recordings of stories and then to send out new links regularly after I posted the stories on the podcast. There were a few members for whom those details were difficult to follow, and a notable failure of communication when we showed up at FMBC for the October 30th discussion, only to find out it had been cancelled. It would be easy for me to blame FMBC for this failure, as they had advertised the event, but the truth is that, since it was my project, I should have checked with them earlier in the week and did not do so. My very wonderful group agreed, at that time, to return to SJBC for a discussion, but it was a breach in my efforts of hospitality.

After going through this process with my group, and especially after seeing the genuine and concerted effort of all participants to be part of moving the discussion forward and to

honestly confront their own part of any continuing harm that might be happening, I had a tremendous sense of gratitude toward them. As I thought about how I could express that gratitude, I came to an idea for a symbolic gift—one that would not have a great deal of monetary value, but would be pretty and would express the sense that each of these people had offered light to my path this year.



Figure 2—Origami Luminary

I had learned, last year, how to make an origami luminary (Fig. 2) and I decided that giving one of these to all of the participants in my project well as to those who had helped me at FMBC, would be a nice way to show them my gratitude.

I bought some pretty paper and made each person a luminary, placed a battery powered candle in each one, and gave it to them with a letter of thanks.

It was interesting to note the surprise which most of them expressed at being thanked in this way. While the luminary itself has no real value and was not expensive to make, to me it felt like the right way to offer my thanks: something I made, which also offers light as an expression of thanks for the ways in which they offered light to me.

The Project Process

As previously mentioned in this paper, the process of acquiring participants for this project was far from simple. First, before it was even possible for me to begin actually lining up people to be part of the project, I needed to ascertain whether or not members of FMBC would really participate. In order to get approval for the proposal last spring, I connected with one of the ministers at FMBC, Rev. Michelle Jones, who worked with her senior pastor, Rev. Dr. Clifford A. Jones, to secure permission for me to work with FMBC members on this project.

Having gotten that permission, I still did not know whether there would be members who would be willing to do the project. At the July event at FMBC, I distributed fliers, asking for those who expressed interest to contact me. It was my hope to build up an email file from which I could solicit participants as the project got started. In addition, Rev. Michelle Jones sent out a church-wide email, also asking for interest. From the 200 fliers distributed and the church-wide email, I received one reply of interest.

At the September event, where I was able to solicit members for actual participation, I gave out about 100 more fliers. I had, since July, been to a Bible study to solicit interest, and spoken with Rev. Jones (see Change #2). At the September event, several people expressed an interest in participating in the project. My mistake was in leaving it up to them to make the contact. I do not know for sure that I would have gotten more participants, although there were at least three people at the September meeting who told me that they were definitely going to participate. If I had it to do over again, I would have taken their emails and phone numbers at that time and contacted them myself, issuing a personal invitation and taking the time to explain the project one-on-one, as I was able to do at St. John's.

The process at St. John's was simpler, primarily because I am theirs. First of all, these people have supported me all along, both in my ministry and in my education. Many of them regularly ask me about my studies and where I am in the process. Additionally, they have a vested interest in my success: they have invested time and money into the idea that the church as a whole will benefit from my pursuit of a doctorate in ministry. It would be a shame if I could not finish the degree because no one took the time to be part of my project. Finally, we have a relationship of trust, built over years of mutual friendship and service. While I am not infallible (they would laugh at the understatement of that), the people of St. John's trust my integrity and they trust me to keep them safe. They do not believe that I would set them up to be hurt or judged, or that I would be irresponsible in approaching such a delicate topic.

At St. John's, I distributed fliers in worship, sent out an all-church email and posted an invitation in our weekly publication, *The Family News*. Although some expressed an interest but did not have the time to participate, I did not have trouble finding enough members of St. John's to create situations for genuine dialogue. Fortunately for me, the group who self-identified was somewhat diverse: three who identify as African-American, with the rest identifying as Caucasian; six who identify as female, with the rest identifying as male; two who identify as Greatest Generation, with the rest identifying as Baby Boomers; and seven who are oldest or only siblings, with one middle child and two third or youngest. The diversity of the group helped to facilitate broader discussions and also meant that those participating in the project would be going back to a wide variety of groups within the church, including five completely different Sunday School classes.

The Recordings and the Podcast

Since the recordings and the publication of the podcast happened simultaneously with the discussion groups, it is difficult to know which to talk about first. As the stories on the podcast were the element which I believed would help the discussion move forward the most, I will start with that process. The goal of this process was to have private sessions with as many of the group members as possible, and give them a chance to tell stories about their own lives: their childhoods, their life of faith and their encounters with race in particular. The following group members met with me and completed a recording, giving me permission to post it on our podcast:

SJ 1	SJ 3	SJ 4	SJ 5	SJ 6
SJ 7	SJ 10	SJ 11	FM 1	FM 3

FM 2 did not meet with me or record a story, but sent a written biography. Although her biography listed some facts about her life, FM 2 did not complete surveys or come to discussions, and her story included only her jobs and her call to ministry. While it showed the great power of her call and her pride in her work, it did not address the issues listed above, and

so I have not used it in the podcast or as a formal part of the data collected. SJ 2 and SJ 8 were unable to come in to record their stories. All recordings can be found at

<http://makingroom.blogspot.com/> .

The recordings for FM 1 and FM 3 were made at FMBC in Room 309 on October 10, 2016 and October 13, 2016 respectively. For SJBC members, recordings were made in various places, including my office at SJBC, at the home of the member, at the workplace of the member, and at another area church in the prayer room. Dates for our recording meetings, all in 2016, were:

SJ 1—October 12

SJ 6—November 22

SJ 3—November 17

SJ 7—October 31

SJ 4—November 8

SJ 9—November 2

SJ 5—November 3

SJ 11—November 18

To begin the recording session, all participants were asked to introduce themselves in any way they would like to be identified and to tell about who they are. For many participants, little questioning or instruction beyond that initial introduction was necessary, as their stories flowed naturally from there. For some, I offered interview questions in order to lead us to the next avenue of the recording. Most recordings ended up being around 20 minutes long, with the longest being around 50 minutes. All recordings were edited for continuity, but I did not edit for time. The individuals had been asked to tell stories, and stories have a rhythm. I did tell group participants that I understood if they were unable to listen to every minute of every recording. The host site for the recordings, Soundcloud.com, allows users to move forward and backward in the recording easily by simply clicking on a spot in the recording (Fig. 3)¹⁵ and listeners were free to do so if they did not have time to listen to the entire recording.

¹⁵ <https://soundcloud.com/marf5-0/makingroomjlwav> .



Figure 3—Soundcloud.com

To make the recordings, I used the Zoom H2N Handy Recorder, and edited with the accompanying software from Wavepad, Wavepad LE9. I used Soundcloud.com to post recordings, and then, after creating the podcast “Making Room” on the Blogger.com website, I created a link to each recording so that, by going to the link <http://makingroom.blogspot.com/>, listeners had only to click on the link of the story to which they would like to listen, and it would begin automatically. While the initial recordings took anywhere from 30 minutes overall to 1 ½ hours, the editing and posting usually required another hour per person. In a few cases, where splicing and further editing were required, posting recordings took up to two hours per person.

In one case, a group member had trouble hearing the recordings and may also have had some trouble accessing them on her computer. In her case, I burned CD’s which she could listen to in her car or on a CD player. She told me those worked for her. Other than her issue with volume, participants expressed that they were able to access the podcast by clicking on the link with no problem. The advantage of using the podcast was decidedly in its ease of use. Burning CD’s of all recordings for every participant would have been expensive and even more time-consuming. The podcast enabled participants to access the recordings on computers and cell phones with equal ease, making it possible for them to listen while they drove or took walks or sat at home. It created a very intimate access to another individual’s stories, without that individual having to be in the room or even be conscious of being listened to.

The Discussion Sessions

September 25: Community Gathering at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, 4:30pm-7:30pm

Group from SJBC present included: 13 Adults, including 8 from project group, and 9 Youth

Total attending the meeting: approximately 225

Asked to discuss Implicit Bias Definition and Application

Asked to discuss the question “What can we do to improve race relations in Charlotte?”

Our group met in Rm. 133 and was a nicely diverse group. Most of the adults were middle aged or older, but there were also some teenagers in the group. We had a fairly even mix of African-American and European American and a good number of both males and females. J. Anderson got us started, walking the group through the definition of “implicit bias” and the process through which our group would have our discussion.

We began the conversation with some time on implicit bias and how it appears in our lives. We talked about birth order and the privileges (and responsibilities) of being the oldest child, as well as the privileges (and lack of responsibilities) of being the youngest child. We talked about where our biases had come from: family, institutions, culture, peers, or a myriad of other things. Many people talked about their experiences in school—a great many had grown up in single-race schools, where their exposure to people who did not identify as the same race as they did was either non-existent or minimal. One woman commented that she experienced a change when she moved to a predominantly white school. At her all-African-American school, she was an achiever and well-liked by teachers. She was called on regularly. At the desegregated school, her teachers would not call on her and she felt like she was a non-entity.

We talked about our families of origin, and, again, many people acknowledged that, while there was not animosity toward people of other races in their homes, there also was not a great deal of experience with people of other races. One woman told her family story, which included quite a bit of contact with people who identify as Hispanic, but for many in the group

their interactions, on a daily basis, with people who were not hued the same as themselves was minimal.

We talked about how our institutions have fed the divide. We raised the issue of church, and talked about the necessity for the existence of the African-American church and the important role it has played as a haven for the African-American community. We talked about how media has fed the divide and how it has spread fear as a common denominator in every community. When we began to talk about solutions, our time was growing late. A common comment I heard from everyone involved was that we needed more time (not a fault of the program, just a reality). We received some individual recommendations:

- End entitlements
- Bring equality to school

Far and away, the most common recommendation was for more conversation between us. After the discussion ended, one participant in our group said, “We really didn’t get to the hardest topic. We need to talk honestly and to be able to say the hardest things to each other.”

As we moved back into the big group, our group continued to talk with each other. One thing we mentioned was that we had made some strides forward, in terms of listening to each other, as a group; perhaps at the next community conversation, if we could be in the same group, we could start a little further along and go deeper.

October 19: Project Group Meeting At St. John’s—4:30-6:00pm

Present: FM 3, SJ 2, SJ 5, SJ 9, SJ 1, SJ 6, SJ 3, SJ 4

Definition of Terms

Implicit Bias: Having privilege or advantage over another group about which one is not aware; accepting, possibly unconsciously, advantages based on factors of identity or chance.

White Fragility: The tendency of white Americans to deny privilege or implicit bias; the tendency of the advantaged person to deny, and become offended, at any implication of advantage or wrong-doing.

Meritocracy: The belief that people earn what they have; that people, in actual, real-life situations, are getting what they deserve.

Legal versus Moral: The distinction made by civil rights groups and movements between obedience to laws and obedience to moral responsibilities; the inclusion of the idea that all laws may not be morally correct.

Systemic: Widespread and support by the status quo in existing systems, organizations, and authorities.

Persistent: Ongoing and self-perpetuating.

Damaging: Causing observable harm.

We began the discussion with the presentation of these definitions and the question, “Are there any of these definitions you do not understand?”

SJ 1 asked about the term “White Fragility,” and, after hearing the explanation, the group discussed whether or not that term rang true with them. We talked about “White lady tears,” which is the way white women tend to turn the attention to themselves at any implication of wrong-doing by becoming upset or by crying. We talked about the question, “Why are white people so prone to anger on this issue?” This area of discussion was one to which we returned often. This group does not think of themselves as racists. They are not hateful, they do not condone or support violence, they are active in the work of helping people who face poverty and the issues surrounding poverty. A huge place of confusion for them is how they might be culpable in the issue of race. SJ 1 commented, of “White Fragility” “I guess I am fragile because this is making me a little upset.”

From there, we turned to the idea of Meritocracy, and the deeply held belief of white Americans that they have earned everything they have. Here, several members of the group took the lead. FM 3 spent some time explaining about people he knows, and situations he can name specifically, where African-American people are denied access to economic benefits simply because they are African-American. SJ 3 explored the many ways that white Americans have

advantages, including the ability of our parents to get mortgages, our ability to get mortgages, the neighborhoods in which we were raised and in which we raise our children, and the quality of our schools.

As we moved to discuss implicit bias, several thoughts came up from the group, including the likelihood that white people have an easier time getting and keeping jobs; the likelihood that white people would not be targeted by police simply for being in a certain neighborhood; the likelihood that teachers would call on white students more often and be less likely to punish them. I asked the question, “What does it look like to acknowledge bias?” This question was difficult for the group to answer yet, and so we went on to the idea that racism is systemic, persistent and damaging in our current society. We talked about myths white people believe: “That happened in the past; we don’t do that anymore;” “There might be isolated events, but it isn’t systemic;” and “People overcome all kinds of things—they should just overcome any issues they run up against.” I shared with them the findings of the Justice Department in Ferguson, MO, where Michael Brown was killed. The Justice Department found significant police abuses—some families had as many as 200 outstanding tickets and were pulled over almost every week on their way to and from work for some violation or other.¹⁶ Clearly, in Ferguson and in other places, the racist treatment of African-Americans is part of the system. FM 3 politely but firmly stated that the different treatment African-Americans receive from police and other officials was something heard about regularly and he/she had experienced firsthand. We finished with the invitation to the group to continue to listen to each other’s stories.

October 30—FMBC Community Conversation Cancelled—Group Moves to SJBC—5:30-7pm

¹⁶ “Justice Department Announces Findings of Two Civil Rights Investigations in Ferguson, Missouri,” accessed September 10, 2016 <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-findings-two-civil-rights-investigations-ferguson-missouri>.

Present: SJ 5, SJ 4, SJ 8, SJ 7, SJ 1, SJ 6, SJ 10, SJ 9, Two other SJ members (not part of project) and a friend from the B'Hai community

We began the discussion with the question about what they had been thinking about over the last few weeks. At that point, we were six weeks out from the shooting of Keith Lamont Scott, with daily reports of findings about whether Scott was smoking marijuana in the car and whether he had a book or a gun. Between those daily news reports and the work we were doing, the group was fairly immersed in this issue. What effect was that having on them? SJ 10 talked about having trouble sleeping, which other members confirmed. SJ 10 was troubled by the shooting and by the thought that there were things we have been doing and things we have been ignoring that are causing people harm. SJ 9 spoke of carrying the burden of these thoughts, and trying to find some point of action. What should we be doing?

SJ 1 reiterated the feeling that many of these issues had to do with economics, not race. People can control their economics, SJ 1 posited. This turned the conversation to incarceration rates, and, again, to the treatment of African-Americans by police. It also led to a conversation about the ability of African-Americans to get mortgages. SJ 1 expressed doubts that this issue had to do with race. "There are laws against that," SJ 1 said. As the conversation continued, and members of the group continued to press SJ 1 with the realities of bias in lending practices, SJ 1 pushed back, claiming that these biases could not be practiced today. This statement prompted SJ 8 to say, "Where have you been?"

Wanting to maintain our safe space, especially as SJ 1 continued to work so hard to understand these issues, I turned the conversation back to their lives. "Where are you encountering this yourselves?" I asked. SJ 10 volunteered that the work she had been doing put her in contact with more African-Americans than her previous profession. In SJ 10's work, people are confronting their obesity and being evaluated to see if they might be eligible, and psychologically able, to have by-pass surgery to help them lose weight. SJ 10 began to look at the evaluation tools, and to recognize ways in which those tools were biased toward white people,

especially white people of some wealth. SJ 10 began to consider ways to make the evaluations work for African-American women to make sure that they had access to the surgery wherever possible. SJ 10 faced some distrust and anger in doing so, and had been working on ways to build trust, to create community with the African-American woman also doing these evaluations, and eliminating some of the bias in the process.

SJ 7 told stories about working for the city, and what it meant to not only be female, but also to be African-American when doing that work. SJ 8 talked about being a teacher, and making sure to keep the expectations for African-American students high. This session could definitely have used a cookie break, and I deeply regretted having neglected to check with FMBC to make sure the conversation was still on. Had I done so, we could have planned to have the meeting at SJBC and I could have gotten some cookies. The grace of food is that moment it gives for people to relax and talk about something that is not controversial or painful. It gives a way to begin the session gently, or to end it with a sense of community.

As it was, when our time was up, we simply said our good-byes and left. This session, more than any of the others, carried a sense of sadness and even despair with it. For the white people, it was a sense of not knowing exactly what to do, although SJ 10's story helped the group to envision the specific ways we might be at work on these issues. For the African-Americans, it seemed to offer both a chance to speak some truth in a setting where people were trying to listen, but also seemed to require them to reiterate things they felt that they had been saying for a very long time.

November 20—Final Meeting at SJBC—5-6:30pm

Present: SJ 3, SJ 5, SJ 2, SJ 1, FM 3, SJ 6

For this meeting, several group members had let me know they would not be able to attend and at least one who had planned to attend could not do so at the last minute. FM 3 started our discussion by telling us that being in this project inspired him to participate in a training weekend for African-American men. It was a retreat, he said, on intercultural and

gender concerns where he learned the ways in which race, gender identity and sexual identity are dividers in this country. FM 3 said he would not have gone on that training if it had not been for his participation in this project and that listening to younger men talk about these issues had reignited his passion for working for justice, equality and inclusion.

SJ 1 also spoke about his journey through this process. He said that through this process he had come to an understanding of the issues of implicit bias and white fragility. SJ 1 had done a fierce and thorough self-evaluation and come to the belief that he had been blind to the systemic nature of these issues. SJ 1 did not know where this would lead him to work, but said that he would be looking for opportunities to do so.

SJ 2 talked about her history, coming from the deep South and moving to North Carolina. SJ 2 worked in the school system, and talked about the ways the schools have struggled over the years, first with bussing, and then with the re-segregation of the schools. What could we do for Title I schools? How could we change the system? SJ 5 talked about working for the city and the city's efforts at diversity, which had been somewhat successful. We talked, as a group, about how change happens: advocacy, communication with elected officials, and protest. I asked, "Do you think protest has a place for people of faith?" There were differing opinions on this issue, with most of the group favoring advocacy and dialogue over protest.

Our friends at QC Family Tree (a ministry organization in a fragile community of Charlotte) are doing a great deal of work on gentrification, and we talked about those issues for a while. Again, we ran up against the enormity of the problem and the overwhelming nature of the work to be done, although with some sense, at this meeting, of seeing ways in which we could each choose actions that would have some impact. One of the biggest changes in the content of the discussion at this meeting was the absence of any sense that this problem is not real, or not one which concerns white Christians. There was, decidedly, a feeling that the group members present were, at the very least, beginning to be "woke up."

We ended with food, and with some final conversations about action points and about the coming holidays. SJ 3, SJ 6 and SJ 2 all stayed to help me clean up, with SJ 1 and SJ 5 taking out trash and putting up chairs.

CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Biblical and Theological Resources

This project centers around the biblical theme of hospitality. Theological resources used have been focused on elements of biblical hospitality, which include welcome, readiness, defense or protection of the guest, reaching out for the other, and acknowledgement of our own “otherness.” I have worked to include African-American theologians in my research, including James Cone, Howard Thurman, Michelle Alexander, James Evans, and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as voices from the Liberation Theology movement, which use the theme of hospitality as a basis of many of their themes. In addition, I have done a great deal of reading on the biblical theme of hospitality and on the pervasiveness, and the explosive depths, which this theme reaches in biblical literature. My biblical resources include dictionaries and books covering a survey of topics on the Old and New Testaments, as well as specific articles on passages used to justify the biblical interpretations I have been making. I have, at times, found myself exclaiming out loud in the middle of a library as I have read the powerful challenge of offering a hospitality even remotely close to that offered us by God.

As a final resource, I used the writings of Dr. Thomas Buford Maston, a Christian ethicist who addressed the moral and theological issues of race during the 1940’s, -50’s and -60’s, and Dr. Claude Broach, pastor of St. John’s Baptist Church during that same time period. Reading Maston after the project offers a perspective on what responsible Christian ethicists have been saying for quite some time, and on the ways the white Christian church has dodged its responsibility on this issue for decades (if not, truly, centuries). It provides both a theological bookend for this work and a challenge to make sure that, 70 years from now, we are not still having this same conversation. With the help of our Church Archivist, I have used, as reflection, some of the writings of Dr. Broach to meditate on where SJBC has been, how it has seen itself, and what language might help us to move forward in this persistent issue.

Seminars, Classes and Trainings

The process for dialogue and reconciliation is a delicate one, and it has taken many seminars, classes and training sessions to bring me to a point where I have confidence in my ability to run a project such as this one. In the last ten years, I have taken a course through Mecklenburg Ministries, called “Souls of White Folks,” which offered opportunities to understand what white privilege actually looks like in my own life; I took two courses at Gardner-Webb University’s School of Divinity—Dr. Sheri Adams’ Civil Rights Tour of the South and Dr. Herbert Palomino’s Conflict Resolution course; I have taken two conflict resolution courses through the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, with the most recent being a training focused on racial dialogue; I went through training in order to participate in a Moral Monday event in 2015 in Ferguson, MO, in which we protested the Federal Government, asking for their intervention in the horrific system in Ferguson, and during which I got arrested. I have learned many excellent techniques to encourage dialogue and facilitate listening, and I have come to a clear understanding of my role in the dialogue between white people and black people, which is to help my fellow white people understand their privilege and to help them to listen to and to believe the stories of their black brothers and sisters in Christ.

Over the past several years, I have also worked on my understanding of technology, learning about using digital recordings, uploading recordings and creating formats for listening to those recordings. I have developed enough competence in recording and publishing recordings online that I am confident in my ability to do so adequately and in a way accessible to my group members.

Support Systems

I have amazing support in my ministry setting, equally from my Senior Pastor, Dr. Dennis Foust, from my fellow staff members, and from the church members. Financially, the church has supported me through this program with an annual stipend of \$1200 from several different budget line items. They have consistently given me the days I needed to attend classes

and I quite often get asked by friends in the church how my studies are going. This issue is a difficult one, but I have walked through difficult conversations with my friends at St. John's before and have spent the last fifteen years building a culture of trust between them and me. Although I know that many worry about the difficulty of this conversation, the response of the people of St. John's met my expectations, in that there were several willing to be part of the project.

Dr. Foust connected me with Rev. Michelle Jones at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church as he had been in conversation with her over the earlier events between our two churches. I met with Rev. Jones and had a wonderful conversation about the project, during which she told me about her own doctoral work, which is focused on grief (for now). Having submitted a proposal to FMBC through Rev. Jones, I received confirmation that they were willing to support me in this effort, and their help in connecting me to their members. I invited Rev. Jones, or any other minister from FMBC, to join us at any session and, in using the FMBC events, kept in close contact with them.

My family has always been supportive of my work and my studies. My parents have offered financial support and the tangible, practical support of feedback and other resources. They are always interested in my classes and in the projects I am working on and pray for me daily in my work and life. My husband has covered for me when I am at school for many years, and has expressed his pride in my achievements, as have my children. I am a fortunate and well-loved individual.

Hospitality as Central Biblical Theme

Once I began looking for the biblical theme of hospitality, it was almost impossible not to see that theme (almost everywhere) throughout the Bible. One of the greatest challenges of expressing this theme is narrowing down the passages to those which express the core of meaning, as opposed to searching diligently to finding a few that might serve. The idea of welcoming the stranger or alien, almost always expressed through the Hebrew word *ger*, with a

few notable variations, appears in the stories of Abraham, coinciding with words of the covenant between God and Abraham (Gn 15:12-16; Gn 28:1-5). It occurs multiple times, in conjunction with themes of identity, justice, and care, throughout the Old Testament. It can be found in the story of the exodus (Ex 6:1-8; Ex 20:10-11); it occurs numerous times in the books of law (Lv 19:33-34; Neh 15:11-16; Dt 1:16); it occurs in the books of poetry (Jb 29:14-16; Jb 31:29-34; Ps 39:12-13; Ps 69:7-9; Ps 119:17-20; Ps 146: 7b-9); it occurs in the books of prophecy (Jer 7:5-7; Jer 22:3-5).

In the New Testament, there are several words which are translated into English as “stranger,” or “alien,” including *xenos* (defined as “a foreigner; a stranger”)¹⁷, *parsikos* (“in the NT, a stranger, a foreigner, one who lives in a place without the right of citizenship”)¹⁸, *philoxenia* (combining “love” and “foreigner” for a word which means “love to strangers, hospitality”)¹⁹, and *parapidemos*, (“one who comes from a foreign country into a city or land to reside there by the side of the natives,” often translated “exile”)²⁰. Despite the wider range of words being used, the sense of outsider and stranger remains the same, and the call to care for that outsider, for reasons ranging from identifying with the outsider to seeing the person of Jesus in the outsider, are consistent with those of the OT. Using the graph below (Graph 1), we can see not only the pervasive nature of this theme expressing the ways God sees the “alien,” but also the numerous reasons, motivations, exhortations, and threats offered in service of the fair treatment of those who might be regarded as foreigners or aliens. This issue of hospitality to

¹⁷ “*Xenos*,” accessed April 27, 2016, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3581&t=RSV>.

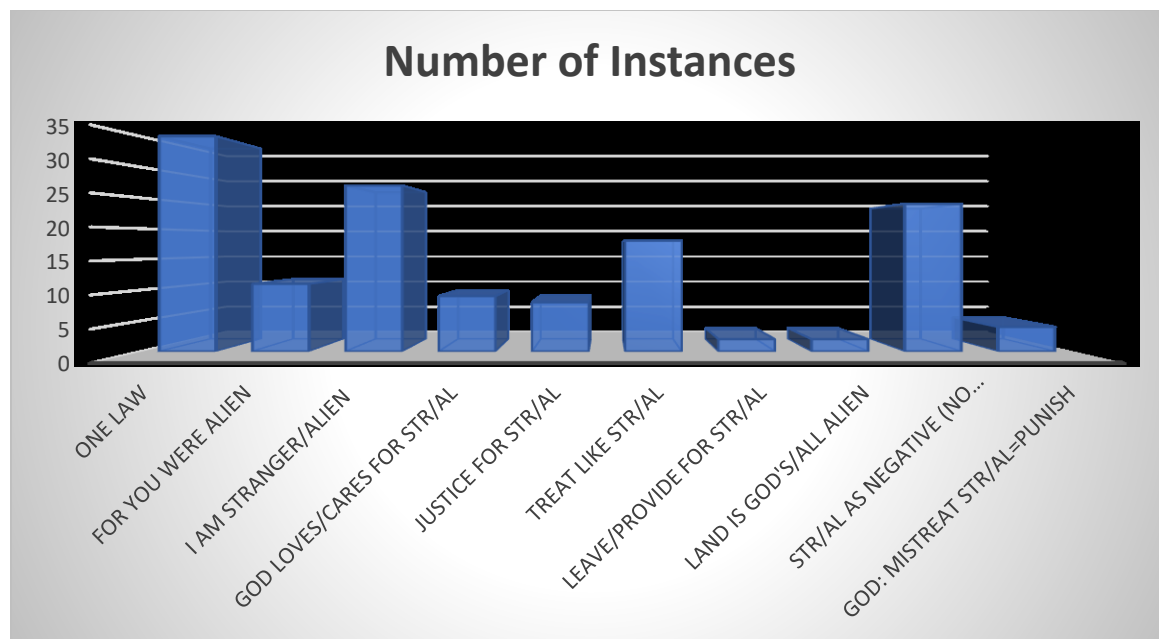
¹⁸ “*Parsikos*,” accessed April 27, 2016, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3941&t=RSV>.

¹⁹ “*Philoxenia*,” accessed April 27, 2016, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G5381&t=RSV>.

²⁰ “*Parapidemos*,” accessed April 27, 2016, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3927&t=RSV>.

strangers is expressed in terms of logic, in terms of empathy, in terms of command, in terms of admonition, and in terms of spiritual metaphor.

There are, in essence, three primary motivations offered to the people of God for extending hospitality (in all its many forms, which will be discussed in a later section) to people who do not belong to their own group of insiders. These can be summed up as identity, justice, and the love of God for strangers. The theme of “identity” would encompass passages which explore the people of God as strangers themselves, people who know what it means to be on the outside. “Justice” passages are associated with themes of doing what is right, either in the form of a person claiming to have done what is right in welcoming strangers, such as in the passages from Job, or in the sense of God providing appropriate justice, as in many of the Psalms. The “Love of God for strangers” shows up in the books of law, but is also reiterated in the gospels and several times in the epistles. Throughout all the passages, and definitively expressed in some, is the idea that God loves strangers, and that God’s care for outsiders is to be honored through hospitable behaviors, to be remembered with gratitude, and to be respected at the risk of imperiling one’s place in the Kingdom of heaven.



Graph 1

The powerful theme of identity which pervades the Bible has been often abused, throughout history, to exclude others: WE are the children of Abraham, WE are the chosen ones and so on. In fact, however, what is happening in the story of Abraham establishes the exact opposite. What could be described as the “international” portion of the story shows Israel to be “bound—in its earlier history and in its contemporary reality—to others...from a genealogical and theological perspective, those others are part of the ‘extended’ family.”²¹ In the covenant God makes clear to Abraham that

Not only is Abraham related to all the families of the earth; he and his family have a calling, to be a source of blessing for all those to whom he is explicitly through recent genealogy—or implicitly—through ancient genealogy—related.²²

Part of the identity of the founding father of the people of Israel is that he is related to every person on the planet. The special place Abraham is being offered is not meant to separate him, but to offer him the opportunity to bring others inside the circle.

By the time the books of law approach this theme, a motivation of gratitude for the role God has already played in saving them when they were the outsiders becomes a key element of the command to include outsiders. Deuteronomy 10:18-19 expresses God’s command to love strangers with an express relationship between what the people of God are to do and why they are to do so: “You shall also love the strangers for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Birch, et al, call this an “ethic of gratitude,” which is not about salvation, as it is addressed to those who have already been offered salvation from their enslavement, but rather “a means by which Israel mediates God’s creation-reclaiming work to those still held in one kind of bondage or another.”²³ Since this exchange of hospitality is the way that God designed the world to work, it is in each person’s best interest to live in this way. Part of who we are is that we are related to

²¹ Bruce Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Tereance Fretheim and David Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 77.

²² Birch, et al, 77.

²³ Birch, et al, 165.

each other and interdependent on each other. Understanding this concept is important to our well-being and very much within the will of the God who made us all.

The theme of justice is a central aspect of this theme in the OT, although it is the only one which does not make a pervasive appearance in the NT, with the exception of the explanations about the criteria used for divine judgment expressed by Jesus in Matthew 25. The books of law establish clearly that hospitality to the stranger is a behavior that God desires the people of Israel to carry out; therefore, later passages explore both how well the people carry out this admonition and the degree to which God expresses this hospitality through acts of justice. While Job spends some time making clear that he has followed this law, and is therefore deserving of justice (Jb 29:14-16 and Jb 31:29-34), the expressions of God's justice through hospitality are more clearly found in Psalm 146 and in Jeremiah.

In Psalm 146, God's practice of protecting the stranger is expressed in the midst of a litany of God's works of justice:

The Lord sets the prisoners free;
The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
The Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers;
He upholds the orphan and the widow,
But the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. (Ps 146:7b-9)

God's practices of justice are spread widely; all of those God helps and protects are listed in groups or plurals: "prisoners," "strangers," "the blind," "the orphan." God is consistent and the justice of God applies broadly to everyone. The inclusion of "the strangers" in this litany indicates the importance of this group of people to God. The Psalm juxtaposes the acts of God with those of human agents, assuring readers and listeners that the "Happy" person is the one who trusts God for justice. God's inclusive and consistent justice is worthy of praise, in opposition to that of mortals, "in whom there is no help" (v. 3). Almost every category of person listed in the Psalm could be described as an outsider, making it a significant statement about the importance of those outsiders to the God of all creation.

In the Jeremiah passages, the verses of instruction for dealing with strangers are phrased as “conditional preaching (if...then),” which Pilarsky points out, “introduces a divine promise,” in this case “then I will dwell with you in this place,” (Jer. 7:7) or “then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people” (Jer 22:4).²⁴ Pilarsky talks about the “spheres of power and action, at the core of the covenant”²⁵ which are expressed in the two words *mishpat*, or “justice,” and *sedaqah*, or “righteousness.” She describes *sedaqah* as the “inner sphere” in which God’s love for people and people’s love for each other is expressed, and *mishpat* as the “outer sphere,” which is the practices and behaviors that come as a result of that love. In the instance of the “if...then” proposal in 7:5-7 and 22:3-5, not oppressing the alien with injustice or violence is in direct correlation to the presence of God with God’s people here on earth and the welcome of God’s people into the presence of God in God’s house. Even the promise is expressed in terms of a household belonging to God, in which people are welcomed as honored guests.

The concept of not just enduring others or avoiding oppression but actually loving the stranger is established in the law in Leviticus 19, where the people of God are commanded to “love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Lv 19:34). In these passages, while the word “love” is invoked, it seems most likely to be “communicating something more akin to proper treatment of one’s fellow citizens.”²⁶ God’s love for the stranger, along with the command that the people of Israel love the stranger, is reiterated in the OT, but takes its most powerful form in passages in the NT. In NT theology, the value of loving the stranger is invoked by Jesus (Matthew 25:31-45), by Paul (Rom 12:12), and by the authors of Hebrews (Heb 13:1-2) and 3 John (3 Jn 1:5). Under the heading of “hospitality,” *The Dictionary of the Later New*

²⁴ Ahida E. Calerón Pilarski, “The Temple Sermon in Jeremiah 7: Prophetic Preaching, Prophetic Proclamation,” *Bible Today*, Vol. 52 Issue 4 (July/Aug 2014), 204.

²⁵ Pilarski, 203.

²⁶ Joel S. Kaminsky, “Loving One’s (Israelite) Neighbor: Election and Commandment in Leviticus 19,” *Interpretation* Vol. 62 Issue2 (April 2008), 125.

Testament & Its Developments points out that Jesus was “notorious” for a “practice of open hospitality,” and that Paul “depended on the hospitality of others.”²⁷ For the writers of the NT, as for Jesus and for Paul,

hospitality...is not just a practical issue. It is a fundamental expression of the gospel: a response to God’s hospitality to humankind in providing Christ as the “paschal lamb” (I Cor 5:7) and an outworking of what it means to be members of the one “body of Christ,” sharing Christ’s eschatological table by eating bread, which is his body, and drinking wine, which is his blood (I Cor 11:17-34).²⁸

Eating with people, especially the practice of openly flouting social norms and eating with the wrong people, was a practice that was meant to express a profound theology of inclusion, mirroring the practices of God.

The Luke-Acts narrative includes a “boundary-crossing hospitality,” which shows Luke’s theology of a “new age of salvation” for a “new people of God” that is “being brought into being to share in the messianic banquet.”²⁹ For Paul and for the author of Hebrews, kindness toward and inclusion of strangers is a “fundamental expression of Christian faith” and a “fundamental outworking of love.”³⁰ As in the OT, one of the main reasons for this expression of hospitality to strangers is that the people, who are insiders in the life of faith, understand what it means to be an outsider, because they are outsiders, as well. This time, the nature of the people’s exclusion is that God’s people are “strangers (*xenoi*) and exiles (*parepidémoi*) on the earth’ (Heb. 11:13), on a pilgrimage to heaven.”³¹ Hospitality, then, is a standard state of affairs; it is “appropriate for a pilgrim people.”³² As the old hymn reminds us, “This world is not my home, I’m just a-passin’

²⁷ S. C. Barton, “Hospitality: Jewish Background,” *The Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 502.

²⁸ Barton, 503.

²⁹ Barton, 503.

³⁰ Barton, 504-505.

³¹ Barton, 505.

³² Barton, 505.

through.” Since we are not at home here, we understand what it means to be aliens in a foreign land. It would make sense, then, that we should be the ones most prepared to offer hospitality to those who are strangers, like us.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, the practice of offering hospitality is expressed in the form of a command. In Romans 12:9-21, Paul lists a series of instructions, all written in the form of the imperative. In verses 9-13 alone, there are thirteen verbs, each of which is expressed as a command: “hold fast,” for example, “love one another,” “serve the Lord,” “persevere in prayer,” “extend hospitality to strangers.”³³ Paul is not as concerned as other writers about the reasons for attending to these instructions or the “if...then” causality of the rewards for doing these actions. Paul’s list constitutes his idea of practices basic to the faith, practices that reflect the result of what it means to have Christ working on you as a person of faith and a member of God’s community.

It is Jesus who ties the practices of hospitality both to love and to justice. In the Matthew 25 passage on the sheep and the goats, Jesus uses poetic language to make clear, if complex, points. First, justice belongs to God, who will enact it. Second, the criteria God will use to make this judgment have been clearly outlined in scripture; it is reasonable for God to expect people to know and complete their part of the covenant. Third, the divinity of God can be found in every person we encounter, as Jesus equates himself with “the least of these” (Mt. 25:45). Fourth, “Christianity is more than an idea. It is an idea translated into action.”³⁴ Being a part of the Kingdom of God comes with responsibilities which are to be enacted here on earth, and just as there are rewards for enacting those practices, there are consequences for failing to do so.

³³ Jeffrey S. Lamp, “An Alternative Explanation for the Alleged ‘Imperative’ Participles of Romans 12:9-12,” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 61, no 2 (2010), 314.

³⁴ Taylor Clarence Smith, “Claims of Christ: The Parable of the Sheep and Goats: an exegesis of Matthew 25:31-46,” *Foundations* 19, no 3 (Jul-Sep 1976), 210.

Jesus uses the word *xenos* four times in this passage. The entire passage is set up in the pattern of Hebrew poetry, and, on the one hand, the repetition is part of that pattern.³⁵ Beyond a simple poetic pattern, though, the repetition serves to emphasize certain words and concepts for the listener and the reader. We are brought, again and again, to the idea of Jesus as hungry and thirsty, Jesus as naked, Jesus as a stranger, Jesus as sick or imprisoned. These become a mental vision, so that by the time we reach the point at which Jesus tells us that he is present in the “least of these,” we have seen him, over and over, in our own minds. Paul Nagano says that, in this passage “What we see in Jesus Christ is one who identifies with the total human family and represents true humanity;”³⁶ by identifying himself with every possible human, Jesus brings this entire concept together, expressing what we are to do, why and for whom we are to do it, what consequences we can expect from our choices, to whom we will answer, and a definitive answer to the question of who is included in the love of God: everyone.

The hospitality of God, like the love of God, is more powerful and more complex than most of us have been taught by our churches. In the last decade, many theologians have turned their thoughts and work to this theme and, as a result, many interesting books and articles have explored the center and the edges of this theme. Several elements of biblical hospitality become clear in exploring the depths of this theme, including hospitality as welcome, hospitality as preparedness, hospitality as protection, hospitality as liberation, the hospitality of God, who is our host, and hospitality as identity. As Martina Mittelstadt points out, in the theology of hospitality, a “Failure in hospitality, whether due to dishonesty, ethnocentrism, or exclusion, results in a fractured community and botched mission.”³⁷ It is my hope that by restoring a sense of hospitality, we might take a first step toward racial reconciliation.

³⁵ Smith, 210.

³⁶ Paul M. Nagano, “An Exegesis of Matthew 25:31-46,” *Foundations* 19, no 3 (Jul-Sep 1976), 218-219.

³⁷ Martin William Mittelstadt, “Eat, Drink and Be Merry: A Theology of Hospitality in Luke-Acts,” *Word and World* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2014), 139.

Hospitality as Welcome

The first and most basic of these elements of hospitality is welcome. The idea of being welcoming to others, includes others who are not part of our group, who may be outsiders, or even enemies. According to Amy Oden, “participation in hospitality is participation in the life of God.”³⁸ As a result of practicing this spiritual discipline of offering welcome to the guest, no matter who it is, both guest and host bring about something new, something unique, and this kind of hospitality “shifts the frame of reference from self to other to relationship.”³⁹ Oden’s entire book explores the practice of hospitality as studied and practiced in the early church, quoting many theologians from the first millennium of the church who wrote about this theme. John Chrysostom, for example, uses a story from Acts to explore the idea of hospitality as welcoming Christ at our door. Chrysostom points out that Christ said, “Through them I come to you,” and recommends that Christians each make a room in their homes reserved for the one who shows up, in whom Christ resides.⁴⁰ In other words, this theme does not merely involve some esoteric idea of being kind or making people feel at home. This sense of welcome involves physical space, prepared in the midst of our space, and made ready for the one who will appear at our door because that person, according to Jesus, is always Christ himself.

The concept of welcome includes the idea of welcoming others into personal space, which is not a matter of whose home hosts the meeting. Arthur Sutherland defines hospitality, in the context of Christianity, as “the intentional, responsible, and caring act of welcoming or visiting, in either public or private places, those who are stranger, enemies, or distressed,

³⁸ Amy Oden, ed., *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 15.

³⁹ Oden, 15.

⁴⁰ Oden, 61-62.

without regard for reciprocation.”⁴¹ It is a breaking of barriers, and an intimacy that invites others in and makes them feel comfortable, no matter what setting is provided.

Hospitality as Preparedness

In the ancient world, the value of hospitality was both wide-spread and basic. Martin Mittelstadt describes hospitality as “the basic practice central to all aspects of human activity from family and friends to strangers and enemies.”⁴² Each culture had specific codes, but shared a moral value of treating the stranger, and even the enemy, as a guest. Paul calls on others to offer hospitality to him as a traveler, stating his request to Philemon, for example, in terms of preparation: “prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you” (Phlm 22). Loving the stranger, however, is not something that just happens at the last moment. Planning and preparation are necessary elements which indicate an intentional inclusion and self-sacrifice on the part of the host. We are not to merely give the scrapings off our plate which we do not need; Deuteronomy commands that whole planting seasons be set aside. Our model, God’s hospitality, shows a readiness on God’s part for God’s guests: “You prepare a table before me/in the presence of my enemies” (Ps. 23:5). Not only is God ready, but there is more than enough to go around.

In a world without hotels and restaurants, travelers often wrote ahead to tell one another of their own arrival. Sometimes, a letter was sent with a traveler to friends of the writer, for whom the traveler may be a stranger, such as in the case of Phoebe. Paul commends her to his friends in Romans 16:1, and asks that they be ready to receive her as a guest. Honored guests are made ready for: houses are cleaned, fine foods are purchased, the curtains are replaced, the dog is put in the back. A theology of hospitality includes valuing the stranger, or the enemy, in the

⁴¹ Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), p. xiii.

⁴² Mittelstadt, 132.

status of guest and making sacrificial plans to receive the coming guest. All of this preparation is done regardless of the identity of the guest. The status of “guest” is high enough.

The preparedness element of hospitality includes a sense of expectation, even anticipation, of the guest. Oden explains,

Early Christian voices tell us again and again that whether we are guest or host we must be ready, ready to welcome, ready to enter another’s world, ready to be vulnerable. This readiness is expectant...It exudes trust, not so much that one will succeed in some measurable way but that participation in hospitality is participation in the life of God.⁴³

Hospitality becomes an important spiritual discipline, one that is practiced daily in multiple ways, so that when the true test comes, the preparedness of the practitioner will allow him or her to offer hospitality in the way that God does.

Hospitality as Protection

According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (see Fig. 4), safety is the first and most basic priority in the hierarchy of things people need. Offering hospitality, then, includes a sense of sanctuary, of protection from outside forces which seek to harm those under the roof. Alan Story of South Africa shares a powerful story about an incident that happened during a purge of Zimbabweans in South Africa. A friend of his calls him during the night, when mobs with machetes are out looking for people from Zimbabwe. She says, “Alan, they are coming down our street, door to door, searching for foreigners, and I have a woman from Zimbabwe staying with me. I will not let them have her!”⁴⁴ The story is reminiscent of the story in Genesis of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which Lot refuses to turn over his guests to the mob, offering his own daughters instead (Gn. 19).

⁴³ Oden, 15.

⁴⁴ Alan Story, “No Longer Strangers or Aliens, but Members of God’s Household,” *Journal for Preachers* 33, no. 2 (Lent 2010), 23.

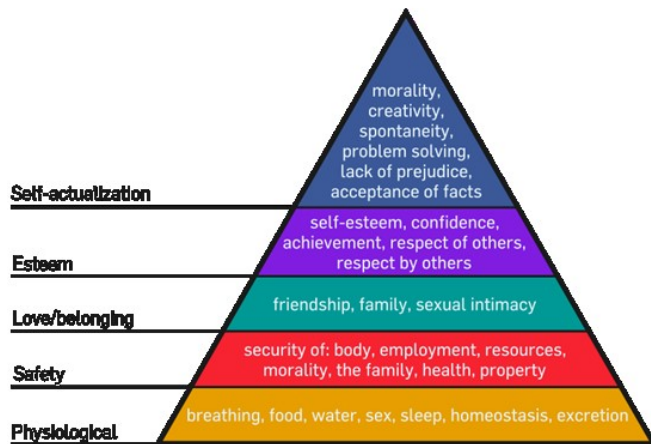


Figure 4: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Hospitality is courageous, taking risks in the name of the other. It is fearless in the face of differences and bold in its protection of those under its care. A theology of hospitality would require that the host not allow guests to come to any harm, and would have the host sacrifice himself or herself before allowing even the slightest discomfort to guests. A situation, then, in which guests have been harmed, most especially if those guests have been harmed by the host, requires contrition and apology before reconciliation is possible. Oden claims that the element of preparedness also means that hospitality leads to repentance. When we “shift the frame of reference from self to other to relationship,”⁴⁵ which is the very essence of hospitality, we turn, we participate in the *metanoia* called for in the New Testament.

Hospitality as Liberation

James Evans points out that the themes of inclusion in the Bible are not limited to abstract ideas, but are intimately tied to a theology of liberation. He says, “God’s revelation is multidimensional for African-American Christians because they were the ‘other’ to whom God’s self-disclosure had been presumably denied. However, they knew differently.”⁴⁶ African-

⁴⁵ Oden, 15.

⁴⁶ James Evans, Jr., *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 15.

American Christians, he says, absorb their salvation as personal, as concerning the whole person, and as inclusive of the community. Evans speaks of “Physical liberation,” which involves “freedom of movement and association and the rights of self-determination;” “Spiritual empowerment,” which is “that dimension of the liberation struggle in which African-Americans come to understand and reclaim their intrinsic worth as human beings;” and “Cultural liberation,” which “refers to freedom from negative self-images, symbols, and stereotypes.”⁴⁷

As African-Americans adopted Christianity as their own faith, they came into conflict with the white interpretations of the faith, which included white preachers who consistently called their black parishioners attention to the obedience required of slaves and used passages in the Bible to justify the oppression of black people by white people. Evans explains:

Black religion attempts to help African-American Christians to sense the world as God senses it. A second hermeneutical task of black religion is to dismantle the misinterpretations of themselves and the world that undergird American Christianity. That is, black religion is a protest against these portrayals of African-Americans as less than human or outside the providential care of God.⁴⁸

African-Americans came to see the stories of the Bible in relationship to their own story. So, the story of the Exodus, in which God frees the slaves, became for them a story that paralleled their own. The theme of freedom is one that resonated sharply, and, the African-American slaves, who were told by everyone in power around them (including each other) that they were outsiders, changed their own interpretation of the story. Even as slaves, they claimed freedom; “by identifying themselves with the Hebrews, African slaves declared themselves as insiders in the scriptural drama.”⁴⁹ The call of hospitality to offer refuge to the outsider, the stranger, and the alien had been broken by oppression, segregation and fear; the enslaved African-Americans heard a theme of liberation and hope.

⁴⁷ Evans, 17.

⁴⁸ Evans, 23-24.

⁴⁹ Evans, 41.

The ideas of separation and joining (elements of hospitality) as related to liberation are also integral parts of black theology. James Cone speaks of the necessity of reunification, with the responsibility for re-uniting on the white community, as part of the understanding of Christianity in black theology. “In order to be Christian theology, white theology must cease to be *white* theology and become black theology;”⁵⁰ in other words, a divisive Christianity is not a true Christianity, and requires a rejection of oppression in order to be healed. In speaking about freedom for Christians, Cone says that “freedom becomes a reality when they throw in their lot with the oppressed community by joining with it in its cause, accepting whatever is necessary in order to be identified with the victims of evil.”⁵¹ Working with those who have been hurt and oppressed in order to bring them into liberation is a key element of hospitality. Hospitality is a practical theology, practiced daily in bread and bed. There is nothing that affects a life in more ways than does oppression. If we are to reconcile on the issue of race, white Christians must put aside all elements of oppression against African-Americans and join them in the battle for freedom.

God as Host: The Hospitality of the Host and Guest

Although there are many places where God’s ownership of creation is invoked, nowhere is it more clear than in Psalm 24: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it; the world and all who live in it” (Ps 24:1). In Leviticus 25:23, it reads, “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants” (NRSV). Waldemar Janzen explains the effect of such a theology on the activity of the people. If the land is God’s, and the people are tenants, then it is God who decides how things are distributed, and no one has permission to exclude others from what does not belong to them. The call to Abraham and Sarah is “an invitation to them to come and be God’s guests in the part of God’s land that God will give

⁵⁰ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 5th ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 10.

⁵¹ Cone, 100.

them.”⁵² God receives guests in the tabernacle, and invites Israel to be God’s people and to come into God’s presence. In addition to Psalm 24, many other passages refer to God as a host: “For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forbears,” (Ps 39:12); “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies,” (Ps 23); “On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow,” (Is 25:6-7).

In the Old Testament, there is a one-to-one relationship between offering hospitality and having experienced hospitality from God. “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, *for* you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Ex 22:21, italics mine). Hospitality is something we owe to others because it has been so generously offered to us. Janzen says that hospitality “embraces virtually all Old Testament (biblical) ethics”⁵³ and that it is continued in the New Testament in the person of Jesus, who feeds people who are hungry, and offers welcome, even to the point of the “welcoming act of foot-washing” (Jn 13:1-20).⁵⁴ Jesus also accepts hospitality, significantly allowing himself to be welcomed by women and socially unacceptable people, as well as accepting help in the form of loaves of bread and small fish from a child (Mk 6:38). In New Testament theology, our very salvation depends upon our acts of hospitality, as expressed in the parable of the goats and the sheep, in which people are separated “on the basis of hospitality extended or refused.”⁵⁵

Mary Anderson explores the feminine aspects of God as host, speaking of God “preparing dinners of manna and quail.”⁵⁶ Far from being a simple matter of politeness, Anderson calls hospitality “vital,” and includes taking care of physical needs and spiritual needs. It is a process

⁵² Waldemar Janzen, “Biblical Theology of Hospitality,” *Vision* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 7.

⁵³ Janzen, 9.

⁵⁴ Janzen, 11.

⁵⁵ Janzen, 12.

⁵⁶ Mary W. Anderson, “Hospitality Theology,” *Christian Century* 115, no. 19 (July 01-08, 1998), 643.

of being ready for each other, of knowing that in taking care of each other physically, we make possible a readiness for the moment when someone is in need of the Spirit of God, and we have prepared ourselves to be the conduits of that hospitality. So, God prepares for the people of Israel by addressing the barrenness of Sarah (and of Hannah and of Elizabeth); God prepares for the break-through of Christianity through the women who care for Jesus. Anderson invokes the story of Abraham and Sarah offering hospitality to the three heavenly visitors (Gn. 18) to remind us of the way we are to see each other and the purpose behind which we care for each other.

Hospitality as Identity

Perhaps the key to understanding the complexity and pervasiveness of the biblical theme of hospitality is in looking at the ties between hospitality and our sense of identity. Understanding who we are with God and where we stand in terms of our relationship with God is at the core of the theme of hospitality. In a beautiful essay, which evokes the realities of this theme as it presents itself in the modern world, Alan Story explains what it means to think of ourselves as “Members of God’s Household.”⁵⁷ Story, writing from Midland, South Africa, also sees this theology in terms of justice and liberation as he speaks directly to his peers, both white and black, in South Africa. The command to love each other and the command to love the stranger are specifically addressed in the Old Testament, he says, with an outline of activities which express this care. He recalls the instructions in Deuteronomy 14:28-29 to be ready for the stranger by putting aside part of our crop each year for them. We are not to hoard our own profits, but, after we have cared for ourselves, we are to take what is left over and make sure that widows and orphans, strangers and aliens are all fed and taken care of.

In other words, according to the Lord, the widows, orphans, and aliens (or the vulnerable equivalent) are legitimate shareholders of every business in the country. And if we give them their rightful shares, the Lord promises to bless us

⁵⁷ Story, 21.

and enable us to live well and long in the land.⁵⁸

Story points out that foreign nationals, aliens, and strangers are everywhere, and that even Jesus carried in himself the blood of a foreign national. He talks of the classification of each other by skin color and other so-called racial designations as “addictive,” and points out that doing so “is to oversimplify humanity and to miss the truth of who we really are.”⁵⁹ Our identity is as children of God, brought into the wealth of God by the will of God, who is the owner of all creation. Hospitality means seeking “an identity for ourselves that all people everywhere can identify with.”⁶⁰ As the incidents outlined in the history of Charlotte described earlier bear out, excluding people from our sense of human identity and spreading the myth of difference is an infallible path to violence and dissension (see Figure 1). Because we are God’s children, this myth will fall, but in the mean-time, our well-being is contingent on our ability to be inclusive of each other and to share what we have with each other. In his conclusion, Story, too, reverts to the language of brother and sister, in telling a Jewish proverb:

In closing, I remind you of the Rabbi who asked his disciples when one knew that the night had passed and the day had come...”Well, then, you tell us, Rabbi,”they pleaded. “One knows that the night has passed and the day has come when one can look into the face of a stranger and see a sister or a brother.”⁶¹

Hebrew and Greek Language Resources

These resources have helped me focus on the use of several different words in common use in the Bible, associated with the theme of hospitality:

Stranger: rGe *ger* H1616—stranger (87x), alien, sojourner

rWz zuwr H2114—strange, be a stranger, foreigner, enemy, loathsome,
prostitute

⁵⁸ Story, 22.

⁵⁹ Story, 23-24.

⁶⁰ Story, 24.

⁶¹ Story, 27.

Alien: rGe *ger* H1616—stranger, alien (45x), sojourner
yrik.n" *nok:re* H5237—foreign, alien, foreigner, harlot, unknown, unfamiliar, non
relative, opposite of son or wife

Neighbor: !kev" *shakan* H7934—neighbor (20x), inhabitant, close-by
h[,re *re'eh* H7463—friend, companion, fellow citizen, other
plhsi,on *plesion* G4139—neighbor(17x), friend, fellow Jew

Brother: xa" *akh* H251—brother (629), relative, same tribe, each to other, like –a
“primitive” word
avdelfo,j *delphos* G80—brethren, brother (346), kin, countryman, fellow,
associate, brother in Christ

Commentary

These words will form the basis of my premise that the biblical theme of hospitality is pervasive through the entire Bible. An examination of these words, “stranger” and “alien,” shows that they are quite often used in a context of instruction to the people of Israel or to the church to take care of those who are not part of their inner circle, as well as in the context seeing that they, themselves, were outsiders. This admonition, first from the mouth of God, and later from Jesus and from the apostles, is one of the most often repeated, most central commands in the entire Bible. Relationship words, such as the Hebrew and Greek words for “brother,” are also two of the most frequently occurring words in the Bible. Far from being a minor idea about how to have bread ready for visitors or even about being nice to outsiders, the theme of hospitality is a central, vital theme in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, expressing the nature of God’s relationships to us and the relationships that God would have us create with each other.

While there are 140 instances in the Bible in which “stranger” or “alien” are used, we can learn a great deal about the significance of this concept by looking at one passage in which the terms occur. A fair amount of attention is given, in the book of Genesis, to the concept of Abraham as an inhabitant of a foreign land. Through the story of the patriarchs, there are

fourteen instances in which (Heb?) is used, most in reference to Abraham. In Genesis 23:4, the passage reads:

“I am an alien and a sojourner among you; give me land enough among you so that I may bury my dead properly.” (Gn 23:4)

The Masoretic Text reads:

גֵּר־וְתוֹשֵׁב אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם תֵּנוּ לִי אֶחָד־תְּקָרָר עִמָּכֶם וְאֶקְבְּרָה מְתִי מִלְפָּנַי:

Claus Westermann points out that גֵּר־וְתוֹשֵׁב is “a hendiadys,” where the two words work equally well as a phrase joined by “and” or as a noun and modifier. Westermann calls this a phrase which “belongs to village and city civilization.”⁶² Of particular significance here is the juxtaposition of these two terms, which mean more than just “immigrant” or “sojourner,” but carry the context of someone who is a permanent resident, but a foreigner by birth. Such people “were particularly prone to exploitation, and Israel is frequently urged to protect them.”⁶³ The position of the outsider is such that “the very offer of the sale [of land] is a privilege to an alien,”⁶⁴ and the purchase of this land marks the first legal possession of land for Abraham: “The alien has now a legal foothold in the land which God has promised to him.”⁶⁵

The common thread through each of these commentaries is the nature of Abraham’s status as an outsider, a fact which becomes a regular element when the words “stranger” and “alien” are invoked in works of law, including foreigners as participants in the law (Lv 17) or offering protections for foreigners (Dt 16:11), or even creating a spiritual metaphor for human relationship with God (Ps 39:12). Understanding ourselves to have come from outsiders and aliens is both purpose and foundation for behaviors which offer outsiders a protected and valued status. In the Genesis 23 passage, Abraham takes a further step from outsider to insider, gaining

⁶² Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Continental Commentary*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 373.

⁶³ Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Genesis 16-50*. Dallas: Word Books, 1994, 127.

⁶⁴ Robert Davidson, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: Genesis 12-50*. London: Cambridge, 1979, 101.

⁶⁵ Davidson, 101

ownership of land for the purposes of a permanent burial spot. The vulnerability of the outsider, and the progress toward becoming insiders, are both themes invoked throughout the Bible as elements of the theme of hospitality to strangers and aliens.

CHAPTER 4: CRITICAL EVALUATION

Results of Project

When I was doing the training to be part of a Moral Monday Action in St. Louis, MO in July of 2015, I had a moment of clarity which I had not had before. The training materials, as I mentioned before, instructed white participants, basically, to be quiet. In order for us to be welcome at an action which was planned by young, African-American people, we would need to show respect for their daily work, for their knowledge of the systems with which they were living, and for their decisions about how the work would be handled. I understood that. In the moment, though, when we were not being told what the action would be, when we were being trained on handling police violence, and when the tenor of the room made it clear that the African-American young people we were working with questioned our presence there, it was difficult to be silent and to give up control. In that moment, though, I adopted “shutting up” as a spiritual discipline—a difficult one for me, as I tend to always have an opinion and always be willing to voice it.

Having adopted that practice in St. Louis, I called on that spiritual discipline again in doing this project. It became clear to me that I was asking a great deal of the people of FMBC and that they had no reason to trust that I would not subject them to further insults, at worst, or further frustrations, at best. Including the discussions at FMBC as part of my project meant that I did not get to set the agenda for those conversations. It meant that some of the things I had planned to discuss, such as more specific elements of the racial divide in America, would not happen, and some things I had not planned to discuss, such as implicit bias, would.

One of the things a white person has to get used to when working with a predominantly African-American church is not being listened or attended to. FMBC was gracious in asking me to lead one of the discussion groups at the September meeting. When I went to the training, though, I was in the midst of a group of people who knew each other, and who had their own ideas of how the program should look. They had materials already printed out, and my ideas

were not necessarily unwelcome, but they were, in fact, too late. So, I kept them to myself. On the evening of the program, facilitators were asked to gather in one room before the program began. Again, I was in a room of perfectly cordial people who knew each other, but did not know me. I was not part of the conversations, and moved, rather uncomfortably, in and out of the room looking for my SJBC group members to come in. At the end of the program, I went by to thank Dr. Carrie Gibson for including me as a facilitator and to give her our notes. She was deep in a discussion with another facilitator, and turned to me briefly, took my notes and acknowledged my thanks, and went back to her conversation.

It is not my intent to congratulate myself for setting aside control of some of these parts of the project; however, I would like to note a few things about having done so. First, my work on this project burned no bridges of relationship with FMBC. If that seems like a low bar for success, let me just say that I have watched, many times over, as white churches step into programs with African-American churches and I have seen very few that did not crash, burn and take casualties with them. Both members from FMBC who completed the final survey chose “Strongly Agree” for the statement “I am glad I participated in this project.” It is my hope, as well, that the relationships I built in working on this project can lead to further cooperation on the significant issues to deal with in Charlotte in the future.

Second, I would say that I had not planned to include a discussion of “implicit bias” in my project, but found that doing so led to some of the most significant work that the group did together. Finding a genuine definition of that term, and then applying it to the real world around us, required our group to look carefully at themselves and at the systems inside which we live. It gave us a language with which to talk about our privilege, and created a boundary for us to use as a guidepost for future behavior. As difficult as it was to accept that our “implicit bias” is working on us and those around us all the time, once we began to do so, the way forward looked much clearer and the fragility of the group dissipated to almost nothing.

Finally, I would say that giving up that control modeled something important for the people of SJBC. SJBC is made up of wealthy, intelligent, powerful people. They are also kind and generous, but they are, as a group and as individuals, used to doing things their own way. Helping sort clothes for FMBC to send to Baton Rouge was not technically part of my project, but illustrates the process white churches need to consider going forward if they are to truly effect change in racial relationship. The group of women who went with me to do this project were volunteers who set aside their time to do something nice. They understood and valued the importance of doing projects that are important to FMBC. Still, they would not have set it up the way it was set up. They would have asked for more volunteers from FMBC to work with them. They had, afterwards, many comments about the way the whole thing could have been improved.

It is incredibly difficult to give up control. Control is a nice thing to have and white people are used to having it. We are used to being heard, we are used to being respected and we are used to our ideas becoming the idea that the group enacts. If we are going to begin our work of repentance for the sins of parents and ancestors which have given us an unfair advantage, we will have to learn to give up control. We will have to learn to let the other voices in the room be heard. We will have to do things the way other people want to do them, even if we do not agree with their way of doing things. We cannot learn unless we put on the table the possibility that we do not know everything and it is especially important that we acknowledge the truth that we cannot know what it is like to be African-American. The only way we can truly understand what that means is by listening to what African-Americans tell us about themselves and their life experience. If we are to move forward, we must let our African-American brothers and sisters drive the conversation and, through their grace, teach us what we need to know to move forward.

Podcast and Stories

Stories are powerful. We, as humans, are wired to hear and understand story. Allowing people to tell their own stories means that we are rewarded with insight into another human which we cannot have any other way. Technically, recording and posting the recordings went very well. The Zoom recorder made it possible to allow people to speak naturally and even forget that they were being recorded. It picked up sound at a comfortable distance and translated well as an audio file. Both Soundcloud.com and Blogger.com made it easy to post the audio file, and the sound quality was good (although dependent on the speaker quality of the individual participant's computer). There was one technical glitch, which happened toward the end of the project. Two of the recordings, the whole recording of SJ 3 and part of SJ 10's recording, were missing from the files. I was not able to ascertain whether I had accidentally saved over or deleted the files, or whether some error had occurred in saving them. Whether it was a computer glitch or user error, those files went missing. As their files were taken just before the project ended (and also right before the holiday season), we decided to re-record their files after the holidays. Technically, they would be recorded and shared after the project was over, but the group would still get a chance to hear them. In a project with so many recordings, files, and links, it was unlikely that I would get through with no difficulties. Having said that, it was disappointing to not be able to post their recordings and embarrassing to have to ask them to re-record their submissions. They were both very gracious about it.

Overall, it was a fascinating process to record the stories of each member of the group. There were, interestingly, several common threads:

- 1) Most members of the group grew up in schools, churches and communities which revolved around people who identified as the same race as the speaker. Most white speakers acknowledged that the African-American they knew best was the family maid or nanny. Some of the African-American speakers had gone to integrated schools, but most of the rest of their lives revolved around other African-Americans.
- 2) With few exceptions, most grew up in households where there was not a violent hatred expressed or taught for members of another race, but there was also not a comfort and

ease of welcome for members of another race. Several talked about the ethic of a parent to teach inclusion, or an early sense that equality and inclusion were important.

- 3) The issue of race played a central role in the lives of the African-American participants. It was more difficult for them to narrow down their stories to tell only a few on that topic. Many white participants talked about growing awareness or enlightenment on the topic.
- 4) Only one participant did not live his adult life in the South. The culture of separate sides of town, of “different worlds” and the clash of those worlds in people’s lives, appeared throughout the stories. Many spoke of adolescence as the first time they had a true awareness of people from a different race.
- 5) For each person, the life of faith had been a part of their journey. For some, it was consistent—at times more intense than others, but always there. For others, there were times of isolation and even rejection of the life of faith; those people spoke of finding their faith again and what it means to them now. Almost all participants served, or are serving, in leadership in their churches, with one identifying as ordained clergy.

The distinctions between the stories were also significant. While one participant grew up in a large household where there were adopted Hispanic brothers and sisters, as well as frequent, long-term guests, another spent a few years of childhood in Peru. One described an adolescence and young-adulthood of life in the streets, while another talked about being far too sheltered. Some talked about efforts to deal with inner turmoil, while others seemed to have lived with more contentment.

According to the final survey, all of those completing the survey listened to at least some of the stories. More than half reported having thought a great deal about their story before recording it, one-third reported finding similarities in the stories of other people, and about half said that listening to the stories helped them see the world through a different lens (See Graph 2). It would have been interesting to have had participants rate whether they gained more insight from the stories or from the discussions. Interestingly, while the discussions generated more of the kind of friction that leads to change, most people commented more to me about listening to the stories. Listening took a great deal of time, and many reported struggling to find enough time to do so. In spite of that difficulty, most said that they truly enjoyed listening to the stories and hoped to continue to listen even after the project was done.

Analysis of Results

Having already analyzed the reasons for the small number of participants, the next logical step is to explore the effect of those numbers before analyzing the survey results. In the end, there were fourteen people who officially agreed to be in the project, eleven of whom completed consent forms and recorded their stories for the podcast, eleven of whom filled out the initial survey and nine of whom completed the final survey. While seven reported having completed the Project Implicit online test, only three submitted their results, although those present at the October meetings were able to discuss their results and some reported taking the test several times.

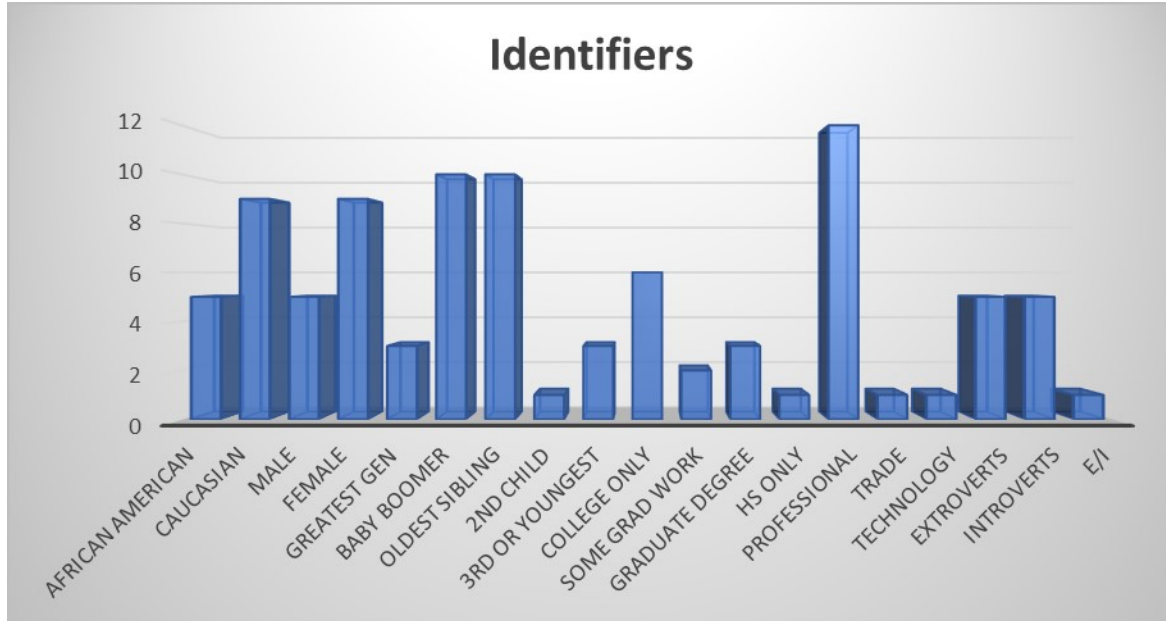
There were some definite advantages to the smaller numbers. The numbers at each discussion, with the exception of the event at FMBC in September, were just the right number to fit around a table, where everyone could see and hear each other, and each person had a chance to speak. The tone of the discussions, while it did become intense at times, never became vitriolic or judgmental. The smaller numbers made it easier to redirect the conversation and more uncomfortable for any person to treat another badly. A further advantage to the smaller numbers was the time involved in making appointments to meet, meeting, recording, editing and posting individual stories. After having done eleven appointments, I realize that it would have been almost impossible for me to have done too many more than that, no matter what the response to the project had been.

The primary disadvantage to the small numbers was mainly that we had so few members from FMBC. We did get to hear from two professional people, both of whom are lifelong church leaders, and both of whom experienced, despite their education and skill, significant instances of racial bias against them. We got the advantage of FM 3's willingness to join the discussions, to offer calm, but firm confirmation of the ways African-Americans are treated differently in this country, and to break bread with us on two occasions. Unfortunately, two people do not establish a reliable pattern, and for the purposes of the project, their comments remain

anecdotal. It is worth noting, however, that the SJBC people showed great deference, both to FM 3 and to SJ 7 & 8, listening to their opinions and statements about what their experiences had been and even changing attitudes based on those statements.

Initial Survey Analysis

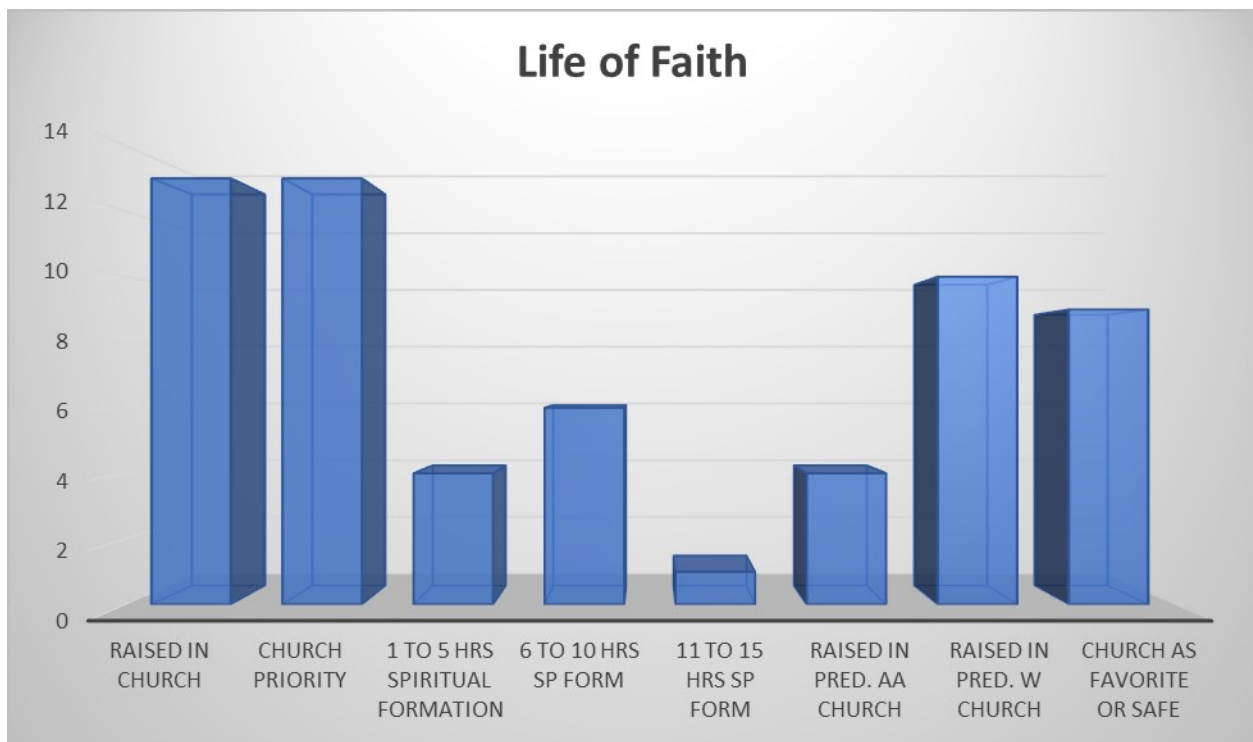
Despite our small numbers, we had the advantage of enough diversity to bring in alternate opinions and experiences, with the African-American/Caucasian breakdown and male/female breakdown close to even. The important similarities, those of similar education and profession, helped to create a level of respect that was important with this particular group. Earlier, I mentioned that one of the things for which SJBC could be assigned some guilt is paternalism. Members tend to think of themselves as well-off, with a responsibility to do good for those who are less well-off. Here, it was important for the participants to see each other as peers, and the fact that all but one had college degrees, with several from both churches holding advanced degrees, went a long way in establishing that level of respect (Graph 2).



Graph 2

The highest point of commonality, unsurprisingly, was their connection to church and the life of faith. Of the respondents to the initial survey, 100% said they were raised in the

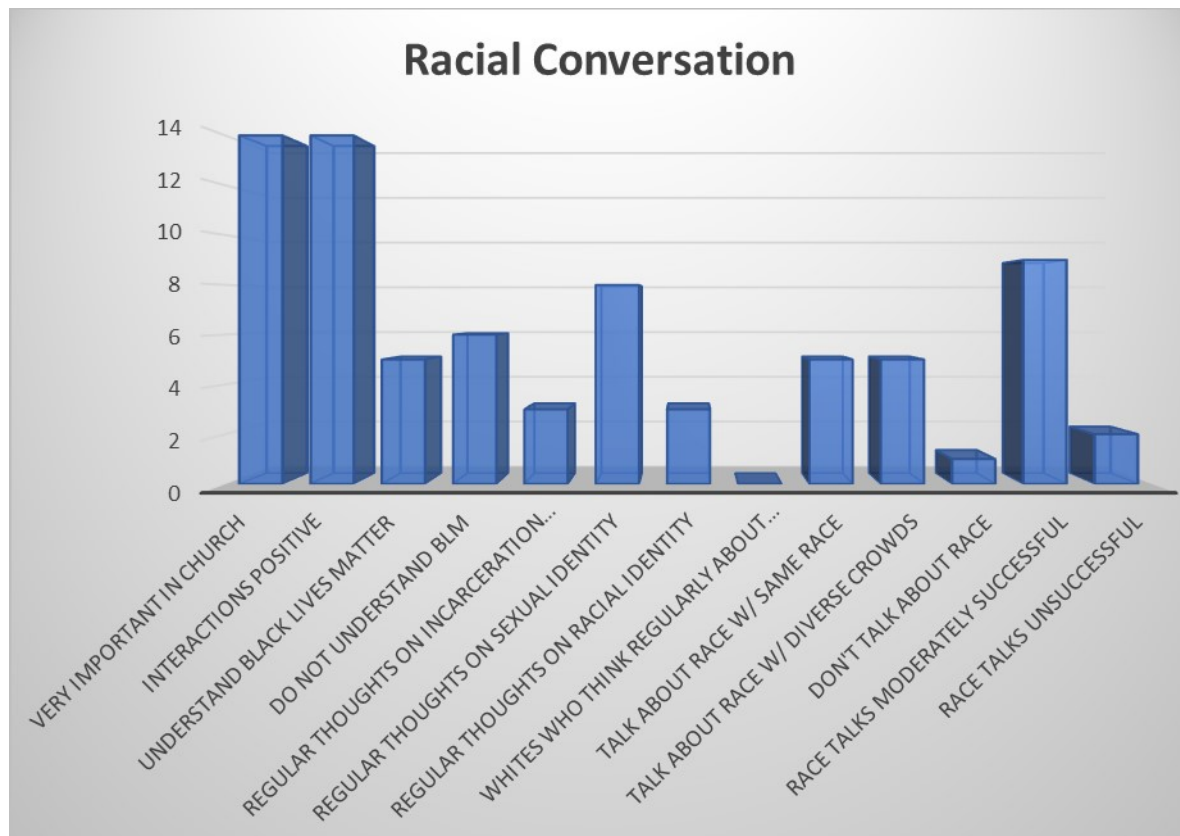
church and saw church as a priority in their lives. All respondents claimed some level of regular Spiritual Formation, with seven noting that they spent more than six hours each week on Spiritual Formation. Even more significant is the fact that, of the respondents, three-fourths said that church was either a “favorite place” or a “safe haven” for them as they were growing up. Whether or not SJBC or I, personally, have earned their trust, those who participated in this project, including those from FMBC, have a long-term relationship with church, trusting its people and its systems to be both safe and helpful in their lives (Graph 3).



Graph 3

At the beginning of the project, most said they did not spend much time thinking about incarceration rates or racial identity; there were no white participants who said that they regularly thought about their racial identity, while all but one of the African-American respondents said that they did. Few of them had conversations about race with a diverse crowd of people, with one response that the participant did not have talks about race, and two responses which said they found conversations about race generally unsuccessful (Graph 4).

About a third of the respondents felt they had a good understanding of the Black Lives Matter movement, but a larger number said they did not understand what that movement was about. In other words, while the African-Americans were doing the regular, even daily, work of exploring their own racial identity, neither they nor their Caucasian counterparts were having significant, productive conversations about race within their groups or with each other to any noticeable degree.

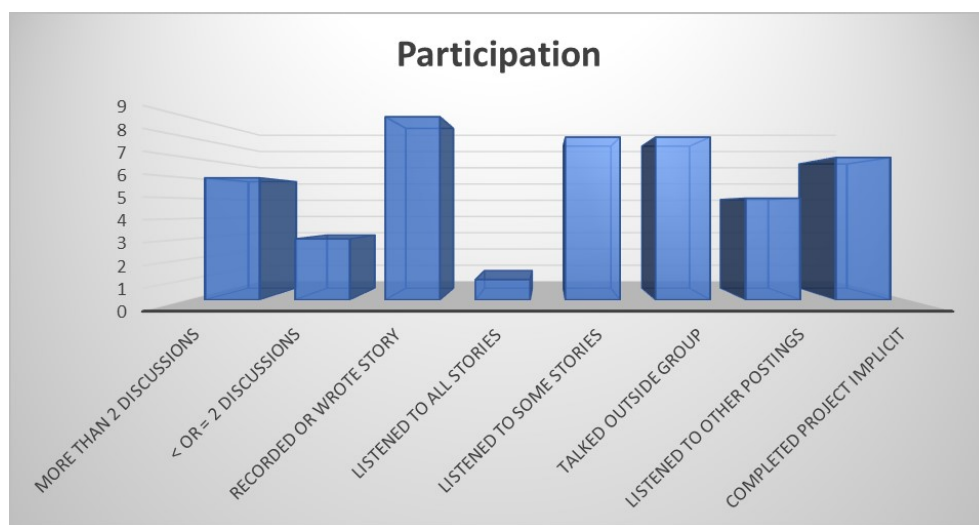


Graph 4

Completion Survey Analysis

One of the most definitive results from the Completion Surveys is the toll taken by the amount of time required to do the project. Each of us was making time for discussions, recordings, listening sessions and surveys in the midst of careers and an already busy life. While most people completed the Initial Survey, only nine were able to turn in the Completion Survey. Still, those who did fill out the Completion Survey spent the time to write specific comments and

to honestly evaluate the project's effectiveness. Of the nine who completed the final survey, all had been able to record their story and had been able to listen to at least some of the stories online. Most had been able to come to at least two discussion sessions, and more than half completed the Project Implicit Test. Of particular significance for me is that eight of the nine reported having had at least some conversations about the project, or topics relating to the topic, outside of our project discussions. What that says to me is that the participants were not only thinking about the project on their own, but were wanting to include others in the conversation of what they were thinking and learning and feeling through the process of this project



Graph 5

(Graph 5). I was very interested in the reasons people gave for participating in this study (Graph 6), especially since so few people actually did participate. Seven of the nine said they felt they had a vested interest in racial reconciliation. Comparing that to the fact that not a single white person said, at the beginning of the study, that they regularly thought about racial identity, and to the fact that many reported, during the course of the project, having trouble sleeping because of this project, it seems significant that so many would self-identify, at the end of it, as having a vested interest in reconciliation going forward. Of those seven, six identify as Caucasian on the original survey.

Very few of the responders said that guilt was a major motivator in their participation, and, understandably, most of the members of SJBC joined the project, at least in part, because

they care about me and they support my work and my ministry. It is always humbling to be loved with such commitment by a community. About half of the responders reported that they were drawn to the faith element of the discussions. Interestingly, we spent very little time exploring the specifics of the theology behind this project, although we did talk about the biblical theme of hospitality at the beginning. This fact is related to two aspects of the project: first, that some parts of the discussion topics were changed to include those which FMBC was prioritizing; second, that the events happening in Charlotte during this project overshadowed the need to explain why we should be talking about these issues. In every discussion, there was a basic assumption that things were falling apart, and a growing sense that the people we thought we were treating in a Christ-like manner perceived us to be as problematic as if we actively sought to hurt them.

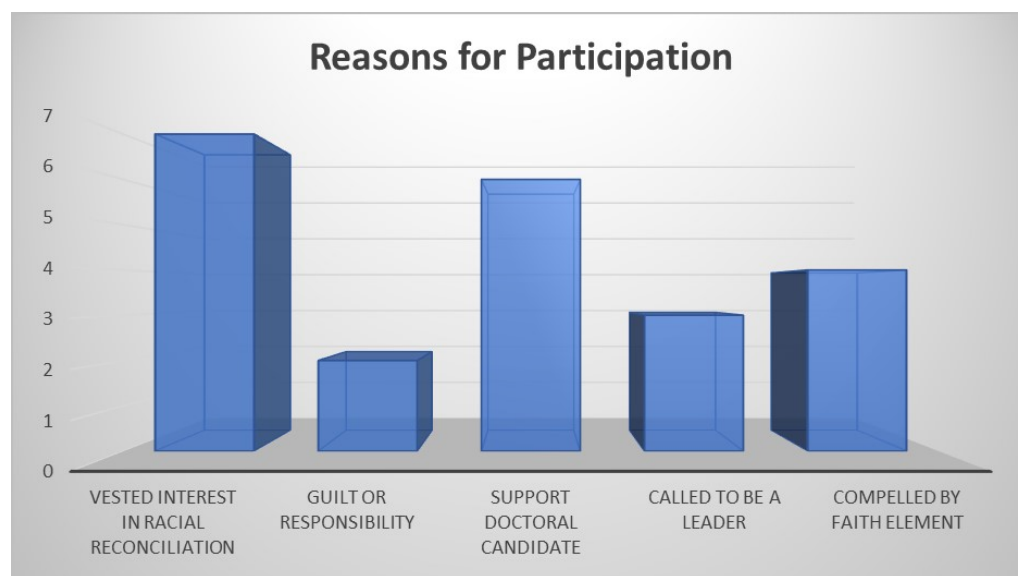
Over the course of the last year, at SJBC, the biblical theme of hospitality had been a subject of worship and leadership training. One of the reasons that I chose this biblical theme to use as the underpinning for this project is that the people of SJBC had been actively working on hospitality and what it meant for us as a church since the spring of 2015. This project, then, could function as a practical application of things we had already talked about, and aspects of biblical hospitality (such as protection and safety) which had been introduced in sermons on a somewhat regular basis. In one sermon about the story of the Good Samaritan, preached during the summer of 2016, I said the following:

As a species, human beings are into homogeneity. We like the people we are around to be like us. And everything in our culture reinforces this tendency in us. We are encouraged to fear each other, to worry about anything that is different, anyone who is not like us. Fear is the currency of our politics and the fear of other human beings is traded in before our eyes on a daily basis. If we are to fight that fear, if we are to be the ones who are ready, at a moment's notice, to love whoever we encounter with the love God has shown to us, then we will need to consciously absorb that love on a daily basis. We will need to see it on our foreheads when we look in the mirror. We will need to read it on our arms as we go about our daily tasks. We will need to have it written on our doorposts, so that when we walk into our houses we know that God is there, and when we walk out through those same doors, we take God with us on the journey.

From sermon "Door Frames," offered at SJBC on July 3, 2016

The people of SJBC are sophisticated church-goers and life-long studiers of the faith. The concept of including others, particularly those who are different, is not a new one for them. It was far more difficult for them to believe that they had not been doing so than it was that they should.

It was also very interesting to see that a third of the responders said that they saw themselves as having responsibilities for leadership in racial reconciliation going forward. SJ 6 wrote in her comments, “I hope to continue to find ways to help race relations in Charlotte in whatever way I can. I see that we have problems that have not been addressed. I love Charlotte and want us to be better.” FM 3 wrote, “Because of my participation on this project I accepted an invitation to attend a retreat on intercultural and gender concerns.” FM 3 was one who indicated on his survey that he thought of himself, going forward, as someone who could lead in efforts toward racial reconciliation. SJ 5 said, “I really appreciate the opportunity to focus on these issues for me personally, and to begin some work for the community at large.”



Graph 6

A significant part of my hypothesis for this project was that listening to other people’s stories, hearing similarities, but also hearing genuine life experiences, would help to open up acceptance in participants and make it more easy for them to truly hear what each person had to

say. Most people reported that they thought about their own story a great deal before joining with me to record it (Graph 7), and about half said that the act of telling their own story in this context helped them to see the events of their own lives through a different lens. For example, many of the white participants talked about their interactions with African-Americans during their childhood with a deep sense of regret. Several had a maid or nanny with whom they had a loving relationship, but seeing that relationship in this context made them think more about what her life must have been like. Thinking about single-race schools, and the lack of opportunities to establish normal relationships with people of other races came up in several stories; most people expressed a sense that they wished that element of their past had been different. SJ 6 wrote in her comments, “Thank you for the opportunity for me to look again at my progression of thought on race—from early in life to now.” It seems significant that among the responders to the survey, no one completed statement #11, “Telling my story” with answer D: “offered me no surprises.” The act of telling the story had an effect on the story-teller.

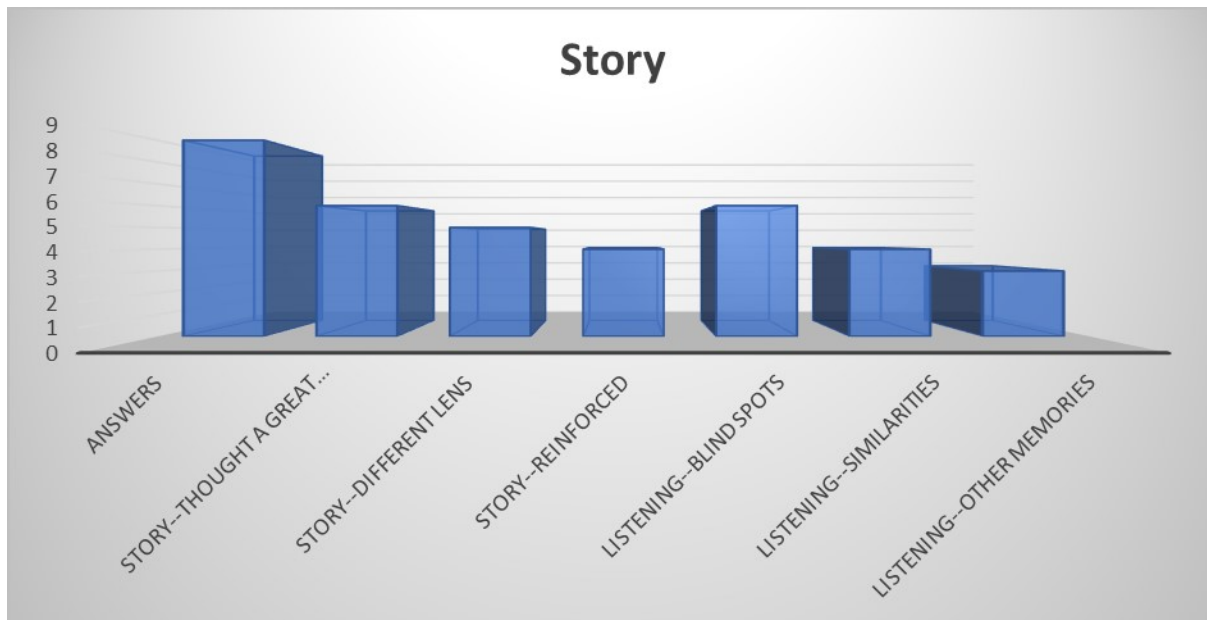
Listening to other people tell their own stories also had a significant impact on group members, based on their responses. Several listed in their comments that they enjoyed hearing the stories and hearing other people’s perspective on their lives. Four of them found that their lives had followed a similar path to that of people to whose stories they listened. Two-thirds of the responders said that listening to the stories of others made them aware of their own blind spots, a response that was as true for the African-American responders as it was for the Caucasian responders. One thing that is clear from this is that hearing someone tell their own story demands respect from the listener. We are all aware that no one can tell us about things that actually happened to us; once we have heard what someone has to say about their own life events, we find it easier to accept the truth of their experience.

All of the participants in this project were members of the Baby Boomer generation or from the Silent, or Greatest, Generation. Both generations of Americans were subject to modernism and post-modernist schools of thought. Modernists of the early twentieth century

had been iconoclasts, insisting that any belief be backed by facts, by scientific inquiry and by empirical truth and disdained the kind of magical thinking that had been “proof” in the past.⁶⁶ Postmodernism, according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, is not a complete departure from the proof-based system of modernity, but rather “a continuation of modern thinking in another mode.”⁶⁷ In postmodernism, difference and distinction join empirical data to define the world; postmodernism considers forces acting on the events around us in order to understand the world and the way the world works. Members of the Greatest Generation and the Baby Boomers Generation, having been born and raised to adulthood in the twentieth century, necessarily look at the world through these lenses. They consider an autobiographical narrative, then, as both empirical fact—that is, in a system with a trust-worthy narrator, the events described by the narrator must have actually happened—and as having happened within systems which affected both the events and the narrator’s perception of those events. In other words, listening to the stories of others had a validity for those listening which enabled the listeners to believe their stories, and incorporate their perspectives into their own, in ways they might not have from a news report or a piece of fiction.

⁶⁶ “Modernism,” accessed January 27, 2017, https://www.mdc.edu/wolfson/Academic/ArtsLetters/art_philosophy/Humanities/history_of_modernism.htm.

⁶⁷ “Postmodernism,” accessed January 27, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/>.



Graph 7

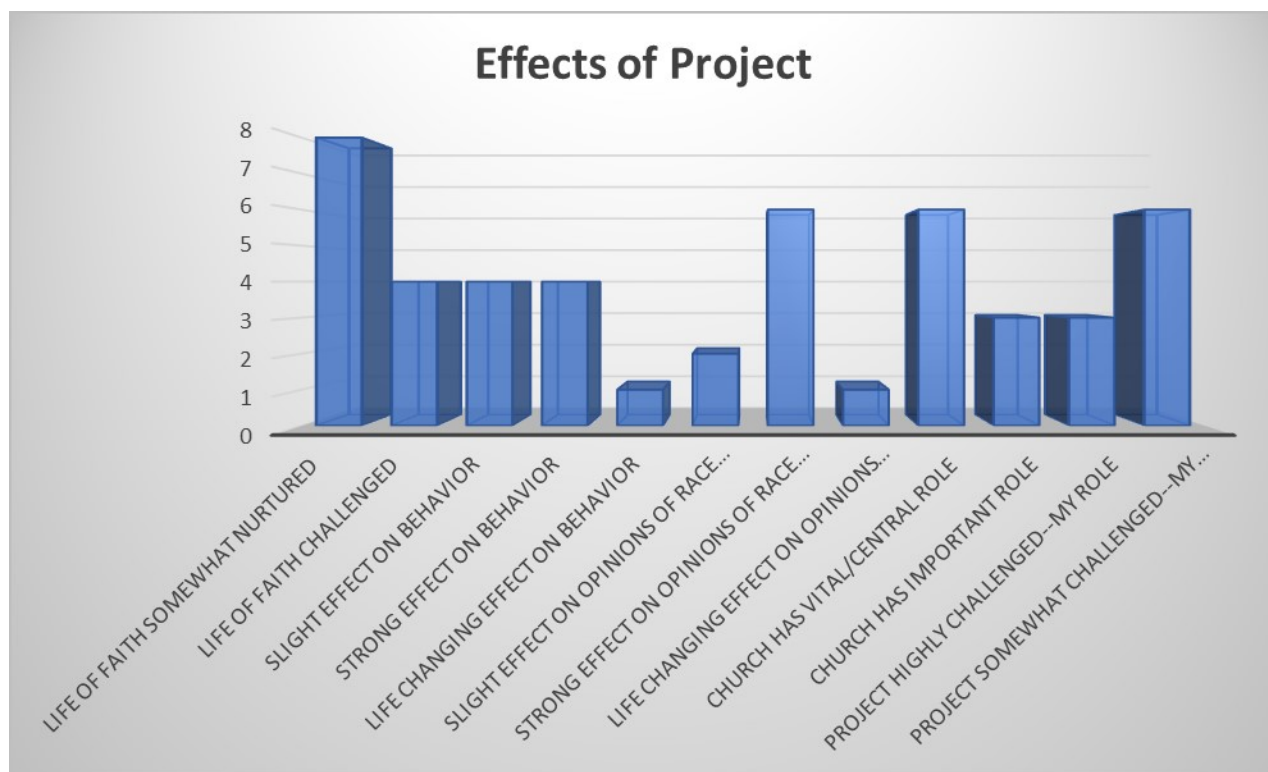
This project presented the participants with issues which challenged and affected them in many ways. All responders to the Completion Survey said that this project had some effect on their behavior. That is, 100% of those who filled out the survey said that, going forward, there would be things they would do, say, believe, and think that were different from those done, said, believed and thought prior to this project (Graph 8). SJ 1 wrote this on his comment sheet:

Great job on this. I can really say this has changed my views significantly. As you know I went through a period of feeling like I was moving backwards but at the end I felt some type of relief which I can't really explain. Also [name removed] did a race class in Sunday School. I brought up the question do we owe blacks an apology for oppression that the white community has caused. I said that 2 months ago I would have said it wasn't my fault, they need to move on and I wouldn't apologize. I am now ready to apologize.

Of the nine responders, all said that the project had at least some effect on their opinions of racial relationships, with one responder saying that the effect had been life-changing. All responders said they felt that the church had a role in working toward racial reconciliation. In other words, this project did not simply approach the topic of racial difficulties in isolation; we approached the topic as a matter of faith. Having done so, these people of faith said that part of their life of faith, going forward, would be tackling these issues through the work and means of

the church. Eight of the nine responders said that this project nurtured their faith, while four responded that it offered them challenges in the context of their faith. This project was not simply about problems, but about what it means to be a person of faith, specifically a Christian person of faith, in the face of these problems. What are we called on by our faith to do? The response of these people, identifying themselves as Christians and as people who put their faith in the institution of church, is that they are called to do the work of reconciliation in the context of church.

Question #19 on the Completion Survey asked, “To what degree has this project challenged you to think about your own role in racial reconciliation?” One-third said this project had “highly challenged” them to think about their role, and the rest said they were “somewhat challenged.” There were no responders who said, “no more than I already was,” or “I don’t see a role for myself in this issue.” Again, in comparison with an initial survey, in which no Caucasians said that they even thought about this issue regularly, it is a significant effect of the project that every single responder to the final survey saw themselves as having a role in working toward racial reconciliation going forward.



Graph 8

In their evaluations of the processes and procedures of the project, as well as their overall experience of the project, my participants were unfailingly kind. In my mind, a rating of “2,” which was “Agree,” was the lowest they were willing to give me. I read that rating as meaning, “There were some issues here, but I don’t want to be mean about it.” With that in mind, I would say that there were some procedural issues that showed up in the evaluation, primarily related to organization and time. “Well-organized,” “Clear instructions,” “Appropriate feedback,” “Resources,” “Good research,” and “Reasonable Amount of Time,” all received some ratings of “2.” I would assess those ratings by saying that it seems accurate to say that the project, while not chaotic or incomprehensible, had many disparate elements to it, making it a juggling act for both the candidate and the participants. At any given time, there were discussion groups to go schedule and to attend, or recording appointments, or recordings to which to listen, or surveys to which to respond. There were several things going on during any given week of the process, and, in the midst of an already busy life, it was a fair amount to keep up with. I tried to

keep the amount of time reasonable, and I certainly made sure to let members of the group know that I understood when they could not go to every discussion meeting. More than half selected “2” for “Reasonable Amount of Time,” which told me that the project asked for a great deal of their time.

It is clear, however, from the fact that 100% rated “Strongly Agree” for the statements, “This project was worth my time,” “I gained valuable information from this project,” and “I am glad I participated in this project,” that their ratings of “2” for some of the things that were difficult about the processes of this project indicated that, though the project was difficult, participants found it a valuable experience. Five of the respondents expressed gratitude in their comments, and others said things like, “was very glad to be given the opportunity to participate in this study,” (SJ 9) and “I also got a lot out of the topics, conversation starters that Martha used, and appreciated that everyone wanted to share an experience and participate in the dialogue” (SJ 4). SJ 9 also said, “While I found each session engaging, I found myself frustrated that attempts to improve race relations could not go faster.”

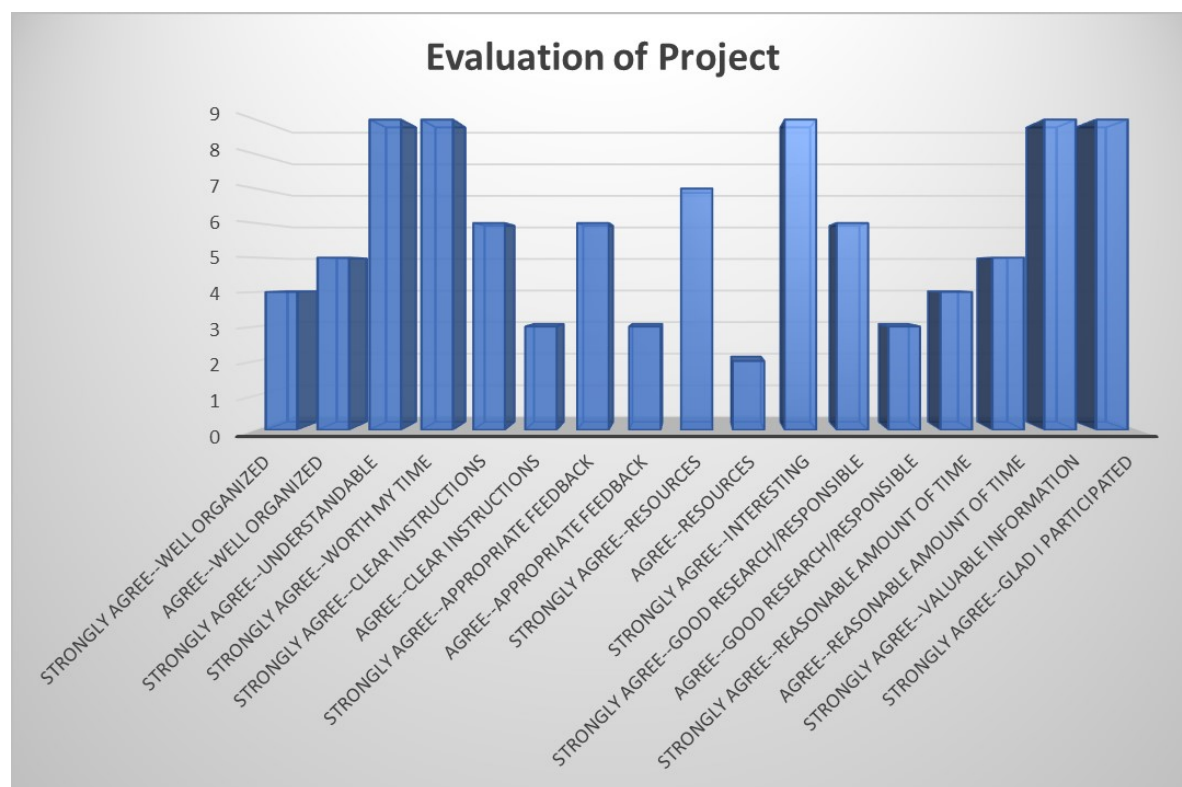
One thing the responses made clear, along with unrecorded responses that happened during the process, is that there is a readiness at both SJBC and at FMBC to do the work involved in moving forward in race relations. At SJBC, there is still much work to do in bringing the rest of the church along on the issues of implicit bias and white fragility. Conversations since the election of 2016 in the church have shown that there is still quite a bit of white fragility in the church; certainly, the culture has not moved forward in having responsible conversations on a larger scale about the realities of race in America. The belief in the meritocracy is a deeply held core of white American philosophy; some of the resistance that happened during this project shows just what it takes to move forward on that issue. Still, the people who participated in this project are not isolated examples at SJBC. While they may not be representative of every member of SJBC, their commitment to their faith and to enacting that faith in responsible,

observable ways, is consistent with the general ethic of SJBC. The covenant of SJBC, which we read aloud in worship every quarter includes the following commitments:

We will take seriously the responsibility and privilege of personal Christian growth, diligently seeking to establish and maintain a Christian atmosphere in our homes.
 We will love and encourage each other in the family of the Church, and admonish each other as occasion may require. Our differences will not separate us but rather increase our understanding and strengthen the bonds of Christian love.
 We will be faithful stewards, as God has prospered us, contributing our financial support for the Church and its ministries and offering ourselves for God's work in the world.
 We will, with God's help, so live our lives that others, seeing the joy of Christian living, may seek to know Jesus Christ our Lord.
 We will be a servant church, recognizing the infinite worth of every person and believing that Christ has called us to active involvement in behalf of human brotherhood.

Covenant of St. John's Baptist Church
 Adopted March 22, 1922
 Revised June 10, 1973

This community of faith takes seriously the call to work toward Christian growth, to accept the different perspectives brought by others, to use our resources and our gifts for God's work in the world, and to do the vital work of "recognizing the infinite worth of every person."



Graph 9

Theological Reflection

At the end of this project, I looked for some way to bring it together theologically. I picked up a book of writings by Dr. Thomas Buford Maston, a Christian theologian who wrote, primarily, in the middle part of the twentieth century. I had read Maston before, and appreciated his commitment to biblical themes as a basis for understanding a Christian moral ethic for living. In a writing about Christians and the issue of race, presented in Atlanta and the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1946, Maston said,

The future of the Christian cause not only in the South but in the world will be determined, to a considerable degree, by what the Christians of the South do in the immediate future about the race situation. Are we going to attempt honestly to apply Christian principles to the race problem? If not, how can we expect others to continue to respect our Christian claims or to hear and accept the message we proclaim.⁶⁸

He says, “It is the church’s business to be in the vanguard of the moral forces of society” and that the great tragedy would be “for the churches of Christ to surrender their moral leadership to some social agency, political party, or labor organization.”⁶⁹ In later writings, Maston invokes the story of Peter and Cornelius and the application of the story of Ham to the issues of race in his own time, concluding that God is unprejudiced about human beings, and therefore “We should be impartial; we should not play favorites.”⁷⁰ He finds “no valid biblical or theological defense for the segregation pattern.”⁷¹ Finally, after exhaustively showing that, biblically speaking, there can be no justification for seeing one race as superior to another, Maston points out that the idea of superiority or inferiority is, in fact, irrelevant. He reminds readers that “The Christian religion says the strong should serve the weak. It is a fundamental Christian principle

⁶⁸ William Tillman, Rodney Taylor and Lauren Brewer, eds, “Of One,” *Both-And: A Maston Reader*. T. B. Maston Foundation for Christian Ethics, 2011, 157.

⁶⁹ Tillman, 157-8.

⁷⁰ Tillman, 158.

⁷¹ Tillman, 158.

that privilege and power are never to be used selfishly,” making any argument for different treatment of any member of any race, indefensible in terms of the Christian faith.⁷²

I also found a sermon from Dr. Claude Broach, senior minister at SJBC during the middle of the twentieth century, in reference to a decision SJBC had made to permit membership to our Baptist Church without insisting that our fellow Christians, who had been baptized elsewhere, be re-baptized into our fellowship. As Dr. Broach lays out, in biblical, historical, and practical terms, the reasoning of the church in coming to this decision, he seeks to broaden definitions, to inform the status quo, and to awaken a sense of brotherhood with others (in this case, alienated Protestant and Catholic brothers and sisters) in the people of SJBC. In telling the story of an individual who has been baptized by sprinkling in front of a congregation, he says,

The question we ask is this: has this person been baptized or not? (underlines Broach)

Presbyterians would answer yes.

Methodists would answer yes.

Episcopalians would answer yes.

Lutherans would answer yes.

Hold your breath—Catholics would answer yes.

Many Baptists—especially in England, where we began—would answer yes. Most Southern Baptists, by tradition, would answer no. What we are saying in our statement of Position is that henceforth we are ready to say yes...⁷³

Although this sermon does not address the issue of race, an issue with which SJBC has had some triumphs and some failures over the years, it does show a consistent pattern of belief from the people of SJBC. We believe that we can find the correct pathways for ethical, moral and Christian behavior through exploration of biblical themes and Christian history, as well as our own sense of right and wrong. We believe that the world is bigger than the status quo, and we are willing to include ideas from beyond our own walls. Most importantly, when we find some way in which we have been offering exclusion rather than inclusion and we are confronted with

⁷² Tillman, 167.

⁷³ Claude Broach, “The Meaning of Christian Baptism,” Sermon, St. John’s Baptist Church, April 30, 1967.

the realities of our failures, we are willing to learn and change, even if it costs us, which it has in the past, acceptance by our peers in Baptist life.

These two sets of readings, both coming out of a period of time 60-70 years ago, have helped me to focus on two realities which have come out of this project: first, that we have known, for quite some time, that we needed to do this work and we have chosen not to do it; second, that we are capable of doing this work. We have happily accepted our privileged place, ignoring the voices around us which told us that things were still not right and choosing to stay silent, even when we saw egregious injustice going on around us. We have, in the past, however, shown our strength of character, our ability to face our fears and our sins, and have moved forward with costly, but ultimately rewarding, efforts of inclusion, respect, and Christian brotherhood. It is my belief that this process, with this group, constitutes one element of the beginning of our work in this area and that the people of SJBC will continue on this path forward in the next ways God shows us to walk.

A Successful Project

If my goal had been to change Charlotte or to change SJBC or FMBC significantly, I would have to say that the project failed. As it is, my goal was to open up dialogue, specifically between members of SJBC and FMBC, on the issue of racial reconciliation. While I cannot say that the project had a profound effect, at this point, on the entire populations of SJBC and FMBC, I can say, based on their survey responses, that the project had a profound effect on those who participated and that, already, those participants have set goals for themselves in terms of specific actions on the issues of racial reconciliation going forward. The fact that 100% reported that the project had an effect on their behavior (Graph F-4) and 100% reported that the project had valuable information, that it was worth their time, and that they were glad they participated (Graph F-5) would indicate that the project did what it was supposed to do, which was to help members from both churches move forward in the work of racial reconciliation through dialogue. When I think about those SJBC members going back to their different Sunday

School classes, ready to share their knowledge when the next opportunity to talk about this subject comes up, I am encouraged. When I think about the trust we have earned with FMBC, I am hopeful that we can move on to the next levels of cooperation, perhaps getting beyond dialogue and into territories of action which really make a difference.

My Story

One of my participants asked if I were going to record and share my story. I chose not to do so because I wanted to keep myself separate from the participants. I cannot claim to have been objective, and did not claim to be objective in our discussions. Clearly, I wanted to move the conversation in a certain direction. From the first, we all understood that we were making a conscious effort to understand these concepts, especially to understand them in the ways that the people of FMBC needed us to understand them. At the same time, though, I felt like hearing my story would set up expectations, or comparisons, that might cause people to be hesitant in telling or analyzing their own stories.

My story is similar to that of most of the white participants: my elementary school years were spent in a single-race environment, we had an African-American maid (although I was not close to her), and my first real encounters of African-Americans my same age was in middle school, where I got beaten up once by two African-American students when I interfered in a bullying situation, and spent some time being a Barbie head for a group of African-American girls to play with my hair during gym. Like many of my white peers, I did not have significant relationships with African-American peers until I was an adult. The one distinction in my story is that I knew Africans as a child. When we lived in Richmond, we had friends at the Foreign Mission Board. One year, a family visiting from Nigeria became our friends. Michael and Christiana Aluko came to our house many times, along with their son, Shagum, One of the first newborn babies I ever held was Baby Girl Aluko, whose given name I still do not know.

I do not know why this issue has been so important to me, except to say that I think it has bothered me my whole life in one way or another. I run up against it all the time, and have

my whole life—that feeling of limitation, of exclusion and suspicion. In my church, we rent space to one of the city’s Head Start programs. Typically, the teachers are African-American and, in the past few years, the director has also been an African-American female. I have made every effort to be respectful and helpful to those teachers, making sure they know that I appreciate the important work they are doing. I believe that they recognize and appreciate my respect, and that they respect me as well. What continues to bother me is that our relationship, even though it is (a) good, is still plagued with the realities of our racial identities. I am a minister there, and their advocate, and they respect me, but there are limits to our relationship.

I find that the injustices I see in our culture hit up against my sense of what is right and fair, and what I expect people who call themselves Christians to do. I find that I am frustrated by the enormity of the systems and feel powerless against them. When Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools became re-segregated as the result of six white, petulant families, I did not protest or voice any opinion. I sent my children to the most desegregated schools I could, in good conscience, send them to, and let it go at that. I have not known what to do about incarceration rates or income gaps. When Michael Brown was shot six times by a white police officer in Ferguson, MO, I have to admit that what went through my mind was, “He was a criminal, and he should not have been wrestling with a policeman.” After doing the work of really looking at what happened, I learned that the true story was that a young person, who did not “rob” a store (since he used no violence or weapons) but shoplifted a pack of cigarettes, was caught and arrested in a neighborhood where police routinely abuse their power. When his frustration with his treatment spilled over, he was shot, over and over again, and his body was left in the street for four and half hours as a warning to the community. After my experiences in Ferguson and in Charlotte, I think, finally, that I am “woke up,” and that this work has become a significant part of what I am called to do.

If the earth is the Lord’s, then the Lord makes the rules. As I read them, the rules forbid the children of God from making any distinction between a biological brother and another child

of God. We are all strangers and aliens, in some way, and have been offered the hospitality of God our host. The way I read the rules of hospitality, we are absolutely forbidden to offer anything less than the hospitality we have received from God, which includes protection, welcome, preparation and liberation. Every single person in this project saw themselves as having a role in this work going forward. I can do no less.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

What I Would Do Differently If I Had It To Do Again

There are two primary areas where I felt that my choices affected the project negatively and, if I were to do this project again, I would do them differently: attracting participants and changing my content to include content chosen by others. First, I would acknowledge that, by far, the most difficult part of this process for me was getting participants. Asking people to help me, in a project that is for my benefit (that is, for the completion of my degree) rubs up against my Southern female (“Don’t worry yourself over me!”) and my independent streak. It has always been hard for me to ask for help, especially when I cannot repay the favor. In the months leading up to the project, I agonized about how to ask people at FMBC how to join my project. With the people of SJBC, I had two assurances: one, that they loved and trusted me, and were invested in my success; and two, that the church would benefit from this work. With the members of FMBC, I had neither of those assurances. As the summer moved on, and I wasn’t even sure the project would work because none of the feedback coming from FMBC indicated that there would be interest among their members in participating in this project, I also began to think about what I was asking of them. I have written about this elsewhere in the paper, but what I would add to that here is that I would spend more time, before asking for any favors, establishing a relationship with staff, and with members, at any church I asked to participate in such a delicate process. By the time I was truly at work in establishing those relationships, I really just needed some people to join my project. Fortunately for me, those who self-identified were truly helpful and gracious and made a great deal of difference in the quality of the project.

The other change I would make is that I would recognize that I should be the one making the first contact. Although I had handed out fliers, which does seem like the first contact, I had left it up to the FMBC members to contact me and let me know about their interest. Having had several people tell me in person that they were interested and would like to participate in the project, and having the weeks go by when I did not hear from them, tell me that I should have

taken their information down when I first talked to them. Then, I could have contacted them and asked for their participation. Doing this first ask myself might have meant that I got a few more participants from FMBC, adding a few more stories and a few more voices in the conversation. I will say, here, that it would have been hard to have found a more reliable and gracious voice than that of FM 3. It is possible that things actually worked better, just having his voice in the discussions, because he was neither visibly bothered nor deterred when group members questioned the reality of systemic racism or of impediments to the meritocracy. Having more participants might have gotten us more voices, but it also might have gotten us more confrontation, or more frustration.

The other element I have reflected on is the fact that I changed the topics I had chosen to discuss in favor of those offered by FMBC at the first discussion. It is not so much, now, that I think those were not good things to discuss, nor do I think they were in conflict with topics the group needed to talk about. What I think should have happened was more research, on my part, about what the topics should be to begin with. I could have taken a few people to lunch, perhaps Rev. Jones or other friends, and discussed with them what topics would be most meaningful to them to discuss. Perhaps I could have invited the members of FMBC to meet me for an introductory session where I just listened to them, and solicited their opinions. It was, frankly, very white of me to pick the topics I thought were relevant. I do give myself the credit that, having seen what FMBC was prioritizing, I changed my discussion topics and went forward from there.

Challenging Elements Which I Still Would Not Change

Despite the fact that this project required so many hours of my time and the time of my participants, I would not change the inclusion of all the different elements of the project if I were to do it again. I have thought that maybe I should have left off the story-telling and just had the discussions; after all, that has typically been the way this work has been approached. If I had left off the stories, however, I feel certain that the element of respect and belief would have been

compromised. While the discussions did seem to move group members forward in their understanding of the problem and of the possible pathways for improvement, it was telling the stories that required people to reflect back on their own lives, and it was listening to the stories that allowed people to empathize with the other members of the group. Without that element, I am afraid that we would have come to the same impasse that these discussions typically reach, which is that we cannot truly hear each other and we doubt the veracity of the other people's perspective. The intensity of telling the story, which many people reported occupying a great deal of their thought before they were actually recorded, helped to break through into their lives. It gave them a shared experience when they met, just as listening to each other's stories made them more a part of each other's lives.

I have also asked myself if, since the stories were too important to dismiss, I could have foregone the discussion groups. My answer there is the same: it would not work without the discussion groups. There is no substitute for face-to-face conversation. Where listening to the stories was a solitary act which could be done in private, just as the recordings were done in private, the discussion groups brought opinions out into the open. Those meetings were a time for people to put their ideas out on the table, and to hear, from the group, whether those ideas lined up with the experiences and opinions of the others in the group. Because we each attended to the conventions of courtesy, the kind of confrontation that happened in the discussion groups was healthy and productive. People came to the table with respect for each other, and gained more during the process. And because the encounters were so personal, we were called to our higher selves.

We talked, one time, about the anonymity of our culture: things we can say and do in our cars or on social media that we permit ourselves because we do not know the people around us and cannot hear the effect our words are having on others. The importance of the discussion groups was that we could see and hear each other—we knew who said what and in what context it was being said. Fortunately for us, we had members of the group who were willing to be

honest about their doubts, and about the challenges they were facing in understanding the problems of race in 2016. Because they were willing to share those doubts in the group setting, we were able to address them, to hear them out and to talk about them.

Even though it was busy, and at time, confusing, to try to keep up with recording stories, leading discussions and preparing surveys, there just does not seem to be a way to get the benefits that each one brings without going through the whole process. For me, recording the stories of each member of the group was a great privilege. I was allowed to hear family stories, to hear questions and doubts, to hear mistakes and learning curves and triumphs of will. In my own mind, I likened it to the grace of being allowed to conduct the funeral of someone in the church who has died or being allowed into the hospital room after the birth of a new human being. It is a tremendous honor to be trusted with those kinds of intimacies, and I valued immensely the privilege of being allowed to do so.

Equally, it was thrilling to be brought into the moments of reflection and learning that group members were going through as they processed our discussions. There was not a single person who did not seem to be confronting his or her own truths as honestly as they possibly could and, while they began the process at different places along the spectrum of understanding and buy-in, their own evaluations of themselves says that they each moved forward in one way or another. It was difficult work, and we did the work together.

Final Conclusions

As this project drew to a close and I began to read and process the evaluations which they had written, I came to two conclusions. The first conclusion has to do with the nature of people of faith, in particular, my people of faith. The trait that I love most about Christian people is how they allow themselves to be called forward by the ideals of the faith, even when it means facing dire truths about themselves or their world. In this case, my friends, who had agreed to be part of this study, each took tremendous care to think about their own lives and to fearlessly examine their own role in the process of helping to create racial reconciliation. Those of us who

identify as Caucasian must face the difficult facts of our privilege and the ways we have taken advantage of that privilege. Those Christians who identify as African-American also must face the truths they see about themselves, about ways they might step into the process of creating a greater sense of brotherhood, and a greater offer of hospitality. In this project, I observed as each person, no matter how they identified themselves or at what point of view they started, stepped into these difficult conversations and pushed themselves forward. It was something like seeing a group of people each try to move a boulder uphill.

My first conclusion, then, is that efforts toward racial reconciliation are aided by work that is done inside the Christian faith. It matters that we have been taught, our whole lives, that we are brothers and sisters; it matters that we have each learned, throughout our lives, that loving one another is inextricable from loving God; it matters that we have sung the same songs, heard the same sermons, and worshiped the same Christ throughout our lives. Invoking that sense of common origin and the familial nature of our relationship in Christ offers us both a call to better behaviors and a language for understanding each other. We cannot look each other in the face and call each other liars; if we are brothers and sisters, we must learn to trust each other, to believe each other, to listen to each other, and to care, with that protective sense of loving hospitality, about the well-being of each sibling we come across. Despite the discord of the city as we started these conversations, I believe that our faith brought us to the table, and that it opened pathways that would not have been available to us otherwise.

My second conclusion has to do with the difficult nature of this pathway and the rigorous work required for each person in the group to reach their conclusions. In subsequent weeks, I have heard from many people who did not participate in my project. They ask me when they will hear about the project, and what I learned. As I begin to tell them what we did, and what we learned, I can see the resistance in their eyes—the same resistance that some in the group felt at the beginning of the project. This pathway is a difficult one, and these kinds of conversations will be required in churches all over Charlotte, all over North Carolina, and all over the country

before we can make a dent in the collective consciousness of American Christian people. Our beliefs about each other are deeply entrenched, as is our sense of mistrust and our fatigue with the realities the issue of race represents. I confess that, although I was deeply satisfied with the results of the project, I often feel weary at the thought that there were only eleven people out of the entire church who went through the process.

I believe this project to have been worthwhile. I believe that those of us from St. John's established trust between ourselves and some of the people at Friendship. I think this will be an ongoing task, and that there is a great deal still to do. Of the many Bible verses that my mother made me memorize as a child, there is one which she invoked most often in the face of difficult tasks: "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." A few miles from St. John's Baptist Church, the people of Friendship Baptist Church hear those words from their pastors (and their mothers), too; the people of God continue to listen, and God continues to call us toward each other.

APPENDIX A:

CONSENT FORM

Martha Dixon Kearsé Doctoral Project—"Making Room"

Consent Form

I, the undersigned participant, give my permission for Martha Dixon Kearsé to use information gathered at Community Discussions (Friendship Missionary Baptist Church's "Strengthening the Bonds of Trust" events on Sept. 25th, 2016 and Oct. 30th, 2016) for the purposes of her doctoral project.

Signed _____

I, the undersigned participant, give my permission for Martha Dixon Kearsé to use my recorded stories for her doctoral project on racial reconciliation in the church, specifically Friendship Missionary Baptist Church and St. John's Baptist Church. I understand that my anonymity will be protected to the degree that I have requested.

Signed _____

I, the undersigned participant, give my permission for Martha Dixon Kearsé to use stories recorded by me in a podcast which can be accessed publicly on the internet. I understand that my anonymity will be protected to the degree that I have requested. I request the following (check all that apply):

_____ I am willing to submit my story in writing but would prefer that it not be read aloud or presented on the podcast. I am willing for participants in the project to read my story.

_____ I am willing to submit my story in writing and give permission for it to be recorded by someone else for use in the podcast.

_____ I give permission for my first name only to be used to identify my story.

_____ I give permission for my full name to be used to identify my story.

_____ I do not give permission for my name to be used and prefer to be identified anonymously.

Signed _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B:
INITIAL SURVEY

Initial Survey

Please answer each question. Please choose the answer that is closest to accurate, according to your own assessment.

1. How do you identify yourself in terms of race?
a. African-American b. Caucasian c. Hispanic d. Native American
e. Mixed race
2. How do you identify yourself in terms of gender?
a. Female b. male
3. What generational title best describes you?
a. Silent or Greatest Generation (1918-1945) b. Baby Boomers (1945-1963)
c. Gen X-er (1963-1981) d. Gen Y/Millennial (1981-2010)
4. What position are you in your family of origin (sibling order)?
a. oldest or only b. second or middle c. third or last
d. fourth, but not baby e. fifth, but not baby f. other
5. What is your highest level of education?
a. some high school b. high school diploma c. some college
d. college diploma e. some graduate classes f. graduate degree
6. Which term best describes your career?
a. trade b. professional c. service d. technology
e. other
7. Which phrase best describes your faith timeline?
a. raised in church b. converted as adult c. new Christian
8. Which phrase best describes your relationship to church community?
a. one of the most important and central elements of my life
b. important, but not central
c. one of many activities, each of which take my time
d. not really important
9. How many hours per week would you say you spend on Spiritual Formation (private Bible readings, devotions, prayer, public worship, group Bible study, visitation, service)?
a. 1-5 b. 6-10 c. 11-15 d. 16-20 e. 20+
10. Which of these people would you say had a profound effect on you as a child?
a. Sunday School teacher b. minister c. youth leader
d. music minister e. none of the above
11. Which phrase best describes how you felt about church as a child?
a. my favorite place b. a safe haven c. an obligation d. a punishment

- e. none of the above
12. How would you describe the church of your childhood?
- predominantly white
 - predominantly African-American
 - racially diverse (at least 20% of membership from a different race than majority)
13. How would you describe the church where you are currently a member?
- Predominantly white
 - Predominantly African-American
 - racially diverse
14. How important do you think it is for the church to be involved in conversations about racial reconciliation in America?
- very important
 - somewhat important
 - not important
 - the church should not engage in this issue
15. How would you rate the majority of your interactions with people who do not identify as the same race as you do?
- positive overall
 - neutral overall
 - negative overall
16. How confident are you in your understanding of all the issues behind the “Black Lives Matter” movement?
- very
 - somewhat
 - not very
 - not at all
17. How often do issues of incarceration, particularly incarceration of men in your community, intersect with your life?
- very often
 - sometimes
 - not often
 - almost never
18. How often do issues of sexual identity intersect with your life?
- very often
 - sometimes
 - not often
 - almost never
19. How often, during any given day, do you think about your own racial identity?
- very often
 - sometimes
 - not often
 - almost never
20. How comfortable have you been, in the past, having conversations about race with people of another race?
- very comfortable
 - comfortable
 - less than comfortable
 - very uncomfortable
21. Would you describe yourself as an introvert (someone who is energized by being alone) or an extrovert (someone who is energized by the company of other people)?
- introvert
 - extrovert
 - not sure
22. How would you rate the attitude toward people of another race in your household growing up?
- cautious, but comfortable
 - fearful or angry
 - tolerant, but unaddressed
 - welcoming and actively inclusive
 - other
23. How would you rate the attitude toward people of another race in your current household?
- cautious, but comfortable
 - fearful or angry

c. tolerant, but unaddressed
e. other

d. welcoming and actively inclusive

24. When you have talked about issues of race in the past, with whom have you most consistently had those conversations?

- a. people who identify as the same race as myself
- b. people who identify as a different race from myself
- c. diverse groups
- d. I really haven't had those kinds of conversations

25. When there are efforts in the culture to discuss race, how successful do you perceive those efforts to be?

- a. Very successful
- b. Moderately successful
- c. unsuccessful
- d. almost useless

APPENDIX C:
COMPLETION SURVEY

Race and Faith: Completion Survey

Please complete this survey, answering with the answer which best applies to you. For some questions, room will be offered for comments—feel free to comment in the margins on other questions if you have comments. Thank you for your participation!

Participation in Project

Circle the answer which best describes your participation in this project:

- 1) I came to _____ discussion sessions with the group.
a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) I was unable to come to any discussion sessions

- 2) I have recorded or written my story.
a) yes b) no, but plan to do so c) I do not plan to record or write my story

- 3) I have listened to the stories posted on the “Making Room” blog site.
a) I have listened to all posted stories b) I have listened to some posted stories
c) I have not listened to posted stories but plan to do so
d) I do not plan to listen to posted stories

- 4) I talked to other people outside the group about this project.
a) yes, I have had several conversations about this project with other people
b) yes, a few
c) no, I haven’t talked with anyone else about this project

- 5) I listened to recommended postings in addition to stories.
a) yes, I listened to other postings
b) no, I did not listen to other postings

- 6) I completed the Project Implicit test on race online and got my results.
a) Yes, I completed the test and got my results
b) No, I did not complete the test
c) I took the test more than once

Experience of Project

For the next series of questions, circle the answer which best describes your experience of this project. Feel free to circle more than one answer.

- 7) I decided to do this project because
a) I feel I have a vested interest in working toward racial reconciliation
b) I have some sense of guilt and responsibility about racial problems and want to work towards solutions.
c) I wanted to support the doctoral candidate
d) I feel called to be a leader in making racial justice a priority in our city

e)I was compelled by the faith element of dealing with racial reconciliation

8)I have learned some things about racial issues that I did not know before, including

- a)the definition of implicit bias
- b)the definition of white fragility
- c)the culture of meritocracy
- d)I'm still not sure I understand these concepts

9)I found discussions about implicit bias

- a)painful, but revealing
- b)confusing at first, but ultimately enlightening
- c)difficult to believe
- d)a personal challenge to work on

10)Confronting my own privilege has been

- a)a break-through that moved me past anger and fragility
- b)a process that I am still working through
- c)something I haven't been able to work through yet
- d)a process that has caused me some sleepless nights

11)Telling my story

- a)something I thought about a great deal before hand
- b)made me see things that had happened to me through a different lens
- c)reinforced things I already believed about my life
- d)offered me no surprises

12)Listening to others' stories

- a)made me aware of the blind spots we each have
- b)showed me many similarities between our stories
- c)was difficult because I could not really relate to most of them
- d)brought up other memories that I hadn't thought of before

13)My life of faith

- a)has been profoundly affected by this project
- b)has been somewhat nurtured by this project
- c)has been challenged and tested by this project
- d)has not been affected by this project in any way

14)What have you found most challenging in this project?

15)What have you found most rewarding in this project?

16)To what degree do you think the process of participating in this project has had an effect on your behavior?

- a)no effect b)slight effect c)strong effect d)life-changing effect

17)To what degree do you think the process of participating in this project has affected your opinion on issues of race which occur in our day-to-day lives (i.e., police shootings, incarceration rates, educational justice, equality of housing)?

- a)no effect b)slight effect c)strong effect d)life-changing effect

18)What, if any, role do you think the church has in shaping the future of racial reconciliation in America?

- a)vital and central role b)important role c)important, but limited
d)the church does not really have a role

19)To what degree has this project challenged you to think about your own role in racial reconciliation?

- a)highly challenged and convicted b)somewhat challenged c)no more than I already was
d)I do not see a role for myself on this issue

Evaluation of Project

Rate each statement 1-5:

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=No opinion 4=Disagree 5=Strongly Disagree

- _____ 20. This project was well-organized.
_____ 21. This project was presented in an understandable manner.
_____ 22. This project was worth my time.
_____ 23. I received clear instructions and knew what was expected of me.
_____ 24. I received appropriate feedback.
_____ 25. I was given the resources I needed to participate in this project.
_____ 26. This project was interesting.
_____ 27. This project reflected good research and responsible instruction.
_____ 28. This project asked for a reasonable amount of my time.
_____ 29. I gained valuable information from this project.
_____ 30. I am glad I participated in this project.

Comments:

Please use this section to make any comments you wish to make.

APPENDIX D:

STRANGERS AND ALIENS-SAMPLE PASSAGES

Strangers and Aliens—NRSV

Gen. 15:12-16--Identity

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. ¹³ Then the LORD^[c] said to Abram, ‘Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be **aliens** (*ger*) in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; ¹⁴ but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions.

Gen. 28:1-5--Identity

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, ‘You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women. ² Go at once to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father; and take as wife from there one of the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother. ³ May God Almighty^[a] bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴ May he give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an **alien** (*magur*)—land that God gave to Abraham.’ ⁵ Thus Isaac sent Jacob away; and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob’s and Esau’s mother.

Exodus 6:1-8—Identity

Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land.’ ² God also spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am the LORD. ³ I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty,^[a] but by my name “The LORD”^[b] I did not make myself known to them. ⁴ I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided **as aliens** (*gur*). ⁵ I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶ Say therefore to the Israelites, “I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. ⁷ I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸ I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.”’

Ex. 20:10-11—One Law

¹⁰ But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the **alien resident** (*ger*) in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

Leviticus 19:33-34—One Law

When **an alien** (*ger*—all) resides (*guwr*) with you in your land, you shall not oppress **the alien**.
³⁴ The **alien** who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love **the**

alien as yourself, for you were **aliens** in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (chapter of various laws)

Numbers 15:11-16—One Law

Thus it shall be done for each ox or ram, or for each of the male lambs or the kids. ¹² According to the number that you offer, so you shall do with each and every one. ¹³ Every native Israelite shall do these things in this way, in presenting an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD.

¹⁴ An **alien who lives with you** (*guwr*), or who takes up permanent residence among you, and wishes to offer an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD, shall do as you do. ¹⁵ As for the assembly, there shall be for both you and the resident **alien** (*ger*) a single statute, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you and the alien shall be alike before the LORD. ¹⁶ You and **the alien (*ger*) who resides with you** (*guwr*) shall have the same law and the same ordinance.

Deuteronomy 1:16--Justice

I charged your judges at that time: ‘Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or **resident alien** (*ger*).

Job 29:14-16--Justice

I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
my justice was like a robe and a turban.

¹⁵ I was eyes to the blind,
and feet to the lame.

¹⁶ I was a father to the needy,
and I championed the cause of the **stranger** (*lo-yadati*).

Job 31:29-34—Care For/Love

If I have rejoiced at the ruin of those who hated me,
or exulted when evil overtook them—

³⁰ I have not let my mouth sin
by asking for their lives with a curse—

³¹ if those of my tent ever said,
“O that we might be sated with his flesh!”^[e]—

³² the **stranger** (*ger*) has not lodged in the street;
I have opened my doors to the traveler—

³³ if I have concealed my transgressions as others do,^[f]
by hiding my iniquity in my bosom,

³⁴ because I stood in great fear of the multitude,
and the contempt of families terrified me,
so that I kept silence, and did not go out of doors—

Psalms 39:12-13--Identity

Hear my prayer, O LORD,
and give ear to my cry;
do not hold your peace at my tears.

For I am **your passing guest** (*towsher*),
an alien (*ger*), like all my forebears.

¹³ Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again,
before I depart and am no more.’

Psalm 69:7-9--Identity

It is for your sake that I have borne reproach,
that shame has covered my face.

⁸ I have become **a stranger** (*zuwr*) to my kindred,
an alien (*ger*) to my mother's children.

⁹ It is zeal for your house that has consumed me;
the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

Psalm 119:17-20—Identity

Deal bountifully with your servant,
so that I may live and observe your word.

¹⁸ Open my eyes, so that I may behold
wondrous things out of your law.

¹⁹ I live as **an alien** (*ger*) in the land;
do not hide your commandments from me.

²⁰ My soul is consumed with longing
for your ordinances at all times.

Psalm 146:7b-9--Justice

The Lord sets the prisoners free;

⁸ the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.

⁹ The Lord watches over the **strangers** (*ger*);
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Jeremiah 7:5-7--Justice

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, **if** you truly act justly one with another, ⁶ **if** you do not oppress **the alien** (*ger*), the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, ⁷ **then** I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors for ever and ever.

Jeremiah 22:3-5--Justice

Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence **to the alien** (*ger*), the orphan, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. ⁴ For if you will indeed obey this word, then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people. ⁵ But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation.

Matthew 25:31-45—Care For/Love

³¹ 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand,

“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a **stranger** (*xenos*--all) and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a **stranger** and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,^[g] you did it to me.” ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a **stranger** and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a **stranger** or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

Romans 12:9-21—Care For/Love

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.^[e] ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality **to strangers** (*feloksenea*).

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;^[f] do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God;^[g] for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ ²⁰ No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Ephesians 2:11-22—Identity/Causality

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth,^[b] called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— ¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being **aliens** (*apallotriou*) from the commonwealth of Israel, **and strangers** (*xenos*) to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body^[c] through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.^[d] ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer **strangers** (*xenos*) **and aliens** (*parsikos*), but you are citizens with the saints and also members of

the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.^[e] ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually^[f] into a dwelling-place for God..

Hebrews 11:13-15--Identity

¹³ All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were **strangers** (*xenos*) and **foreigners** (*parapidemos*) on the earth, ¹⁴ for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 13:1-6—Care For/Love/Causality

Let mutual love continue. ² Do not neglect to show **hospitality to strangers** (*felokseneia*), for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.^[a] ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' ⁶ So we can say with confidence,
 'The Lord is my helper;
 I will not be afraid.
What can anyone do to me?'

I Peter 2:7-12--Identity

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
 'The stone that the builders rejected
 has become the very head of the corner',
⁸ and
 'A stone that makes them stumble,
 and a rock that makes them fall.'

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,^[c] in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people,
 but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
 but now you have received mercy.

Live as Servants of God

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you **as aliens** (*paroikos*) and **exiles** (*parapidemos*) to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. ¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

3 John 1:5—Care For/Love

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends,^[b] even though they are **strangers** (*xenos*) to you; ⁶ they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; ⁷ for they began their journey for the sake of Christ,^[c] accepting no support from non-believers.^[d] ⁸ Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth.

APPENDIX E:
INITIAL FLIER



Tell Your Story

*Friendship
Missionary
Baptist
Church*

*St. John's
Baptist
Church*

Rev. Martha Dixon Kearsé is looking for participants for her project to complete her Doctorate in Ministry from the Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity. The project will include a meeting with Rev. Kearsé to record 3 stories from your life: a childhood story, a story from your faith journey, and a story of a personal encounter with race. In addition, the project will ask participants to attend the September 25th and the October 30th Community Conversations at FMBC and to complete an online test and survey. Rev. Kearsé will be available to record your story at FMBC on Tuesday mornings or by appointment. SJBK participants will also meet twice between 9/29 and 10/30 for further discussion. FMBC participants are welcome to attend those discussion sessions, but do not have to for the purposes of the project.

Interested in participating? Email Rev. Kearsé at
mkearse@sjcharlotte.org or call 704-941-8446

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