

A Day for Sharpening: Iron Sharpens Iron, and One Person Sharpens the Wits of Another
Friday, October 21, 2016 from 10:00am to 4:00pm
Iowa Conference of the United Church of Christ

10:00 - 11:00am Dear Christians White . . . *Now What?*

The pictures coming out of Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014 were eerily similar to iconic images seared into our collective, national memory from the 1950s and 1960s. What does that similarity have to show us? How should we understand Ferguson, Madison, Baltimore? What should the #blacklivesmatter movement mean for Christians (whatever our racial or ethnic identities) living in diverse geographical locations, in urban, suburban and rural contexts across this nation?

The public exposure of the ongoing racial pain, violence and separation that exists rightly concerns Christians of many different racial and ethnic identities in the United States. But the reality is that the brokenness exposed once again in recent months is not new. In fact, even as many Christian congregations have worked on and for racial reconciliation in recent decades, true reconciliation has, collectively, eluded us; this despite our deepest longings, hopes and prayers.

To that end, in this portion of the day, I will offer our gathering some undertold stories as way of generating a conversation about the question, “Now what?” Lesser known (and, perhaps, surprising) perspectives on the Civil Rights Movements—perspectives like those of Rosa Park in the many years beyond her famous bus protest—may help us understand why Ferguson and Baltimore should not have been a surprise. But, more importantly, the chastening wisdom and powerful courage of the religiously faithful—faithful Christians we name and remember less frequently that the icons of the Civil Rights Movement—might light the fires of our moral imagination so we can meaningfully engage the urgent question: where do we go from here?

In the opening plenary of this time, I will offer what a reparations framework offers Christians today as a shift from a reconciliation framework.

This is not easy work. But moving from a focus on reconciliation to a focus on repair and reparation stands to not only lead all of us, collectively, into more meaningful and just relations across lines of racial difference. Such a shift allows us, together, to more honestly look at the challenge of whiteness in the United States and within the church. It also more deeply honors the actual story of the church (white Protestant Christians, in particular) in the civil rights movement, in contrast to the incomplete story we have told for too long.

Important but undertold dimensions of our civil rights story as Christians, enable a shift from reconciliation to repair—a shift which in line with the gospel of Christ—might be pursued. In that shift, true liberation and perhaps, eventually, the possibility of authentic reconciliation might emerge.

11:00 - 11:15am Break

11:15am - 12:30pm So, What's Racial Identity Got to Do with It?

Our racial identities are not simply aspects of our physical bodies. They are not reducible to physical characteristics. Our racial identities are aspects of our development. They emerge as we journey and grow through families, school systems, various social experiences, and work environments. All of these bring us into contact with social structures that are themselves hierarchical and unjust—even if and as we believe in equality and justice. This contact impacts us deeply.

These intersections between social structures and our personal lives are part of the reason race can be such a difficult topic of conversation in multi-racial settings. They are also one reason questions about how to best challenge or speak up against racism can sometimes seem so obvious to African American, Native American, Latino and other people of color and yet so difficult and frightening to white Americans. Our differences, in this sense, really are more than “skin deep.”

We collectively stand to gain much in our abilities to develop and sustain anti-racist postures and multi-racial coalitions for justice when we better understand some of the ways experiences and feelings relative to our racial identities percolate in rather predictable patterns developmentally. For example: Where does white guilt come from? How does one move past it and into action? These are examples of the kind of questions one can engage meaningfully through understanding racial identity development.

In this session we will discuss racial identity development theory generally and the ways white racial identity development impacts our interracial relationships and anti-racism work. But we will give particularly attuned attention to white racial identity development theory. The experience and challenges white people encounter in coming into anti-racist postures is often given less attention in conversations about race, racism, and racial justice. Yet, reflection on and understanding of white racial identity is critical for clarifying and generating empowering responses to it as we seek to work together across lines of racial difference for justice.

It should be noted that **this is not only a discussion for white people**. While it may prove particular enlightening for white people, all of us have an experience with white people in various stages of racial identity development regardless of our own racial/ethnic identities. Thus, this session draws on the work of Janet Helms, an African American psychologist, and her notable work: *A Race is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being White or Understanding the White People in Your Life*, to consider how deeper understanding of white people (whether we are a white person or a person of color) can lead to more effective strategies for social change and justice.

12:30 - 1:30pm Lunch

1:30 - 2:45pm And, Now Back to History (The Internal is Shaped by External!)

In this session we will engage a brief overview of U.S. racial history that reveals the complication(s) whiteness poses that are not only part of the reason it has proven so difficult to achieve meaningful and robust diversity in the United States. A surprising and under known story of religion and race being all tangled up together, when unraveled, can go a long way to helping us re-understand the work that is necessary if we are to *realize* the diverse coalition for which many of us long. As with the

other sessions, the discussion will be geared to understanding and beginning to explore the ways that a different view of race than that which “diversity” or “reconciliation” models presumes can generate much more effective insights into the complex but visible actions that we must take in multi-racial coalition together.

3:00 - 4:00pm Digging In and Getting Concrete: Next Steps

In this workshop we will continue to work on notions of repair and reparations, but the focus will be on identifying next steps for actions. What might repair and reparation actually look like? What justice issues already exist in the local contexts of those in attendance that might be understood in terms of reparative work?

This workshop will build on the concepts that were introduced in plenary and small group discussion sessions. But, we will focus on getting very specific about how to apply a repair framework to justice work. We will break into smaller groups related to either (this will be determined during the planning conversations for the day) issues areas or geographical region.

The goal will be to galvanize for action, leave the space with a sense of urgency and empowerment and address any final questions about how to best articulate these frameworks for the constituencies and communities from whence we come.

Jennifer Harvey Bio:

Jennifer Harvey is Professor of Religion at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. Her teaching, writing and public speaking focus on encounters of religion and ethics with race, gender, activism, politics, spirituality, justice and any other aspect of social life in which religion decides to “show up.” Her greatest passion and longtime work, however, continually return to racial justice and white anti-racism.

Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation (Wm. B. Eerdmans) is Dr. Harvey’s most recent book. She publishes widely in academic contexts as well as in a variety of public venues including the Huffington Post, Feminist Studies in Religion Blog and at her own blog *formations. living at the intersections of self, social, spirit* (<http://livingformations.com>).

Dr. Harvey is ordained in the American Baptist Churches (U.S.A.) and travels the country speaking with faith communities, educators as well as activist groups about the challenges to be faced and frameworks needed to create robust multi-racial solidarity for justice.