

Something to Talk About

A conversation guide for church leaders

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Race

Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/something-to-talk-about-archives>.

I did not want to write this article. That is because you likely don't want to talk about it and I have to admit that I don't want to talk about it either. Yet, if the church is going to be the light and salt of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our dark and decaying world, we need to talk about it, even though it might be uncomfortable, convicting, or result in some relationships that need to be mended or built. It is one of the major topics of our time so, for those of us who serve in the ministry of church leadership, it's certainly something to talk about.

Before I suggest some topics for discussion, allow me to set the table.

We know that the current social and political climate in the United States is combative and mean. It seems as though the primary goal of many in leadership is to exert power over those of other political persuasions. I have a hard time finding evidence of public debate of substantive issues that are not angry, simplistic, jingoistic, avoiding of key issues, and filled with name-calling, shaming, and demeaning of those who hold contrary opinions. Let us, the church, have these conversations in a way that demonstrates the fruit of the spirit rather than the deeds of the flesh.

I have already admitted that I don't want to talk about the topic of race in America and the church. I suspect that most of my readers would prefer to not have this conversation as well. And, that is why I believe it is so necessary. The very fact that we don't want to have this conversation illustrates the importance of having it. If we believe that the leaders in our church cannot handle having this conversation together, it speaks to the problem of unqualified leaders in addition to any issues of race.

Here are some suggestions to jump start your conversation. You may want to start by talking about well-known current events.

- What does Scripture teach about race in a society and in the church? Difficult conversations should start with Scripture, but we need to be careful to not read into Scripture what is not clearly there.
- How do individual leaders feel about what they see in the world, the United States and locally regarding racial issues? This is usually an emotionally-charged issue and those of us in leadership need to be aware of how we and others feel about these types of issues.
- What are the racial demographics within the church's congregation? What are the racial demographics in the sphere of influence of our congregation? I suggest using a radius of five, seven, or ten miles surrounding where your congregation meets depending upon the location and communities served by the church to determine your sphere of influence.
- If there is a significant difference between the racial demographics of the congregation and the community, why is it? Don't gloss over this question. Think about it and discuss it fully as the answer may cut to the core of the church's mission, vision, values, key strategies, etc.
- Scripture commands us to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19) and to be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8). Is our church engaged in this? If so, how? Does it change anything when people from all the nations and from the remotest part of the earth move to our community?
- What are the racial issues within our community (historically and currently)? Is there evidence of biases, discrimination or hatred? What should be the church's strategy to address this?
- Do any of our church leaders have friends of a different race than their own? What have we learned from them? If we don't have such friends, why not?
- In fulfilling our responsibility to equip the saints to do the work of ministry, what should we teach our congregation about this issue and how will we do it?

I believe issues related to race will plague the United States for many years to come. Christ followers in our congregations will not be equipped to deal with it unless church leaders teach them how to do so from a sound Biblical perspective. And church leaders won't be able to teach others unless they first wrestle and deal with the issue and its ramifications themselves.

Please have the courage to engage in this conversation. It may be a long process. It's certainly a difficult topic. And it's very much something to talk about.

*Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.
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