

FROM PASTOR MARC'S DESK

OPC'S YOUTH GROUP RESPONDS TO THE 21-DAY CHALLENGE!

This past week I have been reflecting a bit on Paul's words in his second letter to the church at Corinth.

"All of us, with unveiled faces...are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit."

-2 Corinthians 3:18

To God be the glory for such a legacy of faithfulness from generation to generation!

Thanks be our Living Lord for these and so many others in our congregation whose very lives and witness shine as a beacon in the darkest times.

Together, let us continue to be transformed and invite others into our ministry as we Seek God, Serve Others and Share Christ's Love with All.

When Jesus walks through Oxford, may he see his church shining for all the world to see.

I've always wondered what that means: to be transformed from one degree of glory to another. Years ago, I heard a preacher imagine degrees on a compass when thinking about that Scripture. He imagined our lives being transformed (learning and growing closer to becoming the people that God intended for us to be) very slowly over the course of our entire lives...if even just one degree at a time. I don't know if that's exactly what Paul meant, but I like it.

Over the last few months, our youth and adults have been seeking to do some learning and some growing of their own through the 21-Day Challenge: a 3-week discussion series on the difficult and complicated topic of racism and white privilege. Over the course of 21 days, each youth and adult committed reading an article from a list curated by Presbyterian pastors and social justice advocates and gathering together to share what they learned with the group through prayer and reflection.

I had a chance to sit down with two of our young people who participated in the challenge, Aaron Wanko (an eleventh grader) and Lydia Bartel (a ninth grader). "I think it's really important to be always learning more about topics like these," Lydia shared with me, "I had never really talked much about [racism] much before. I had known a little bit about it because of my parents' interest in it, but

I'd never really discussed it. It was really good to hear other people's perspectives and experiences with it."

Aaron Wanko agreed. Aaron shared that this is a topic that young people are hungry to talk about. "I have a few friends that I talk about this stuff with a lot," he shared, "My main friend group all went to the vigil that took place in uptown Oxford." Wanko also shared that he felt personally very grateful to be able to have a space to talk about such a relevant issue in church.

It was really good to talk about this stuff in a non-judgmental setting," he shared, "it was really cool to hear everyone's different opinions...and to compare their experiences to mine. It was eye-opening."

One thing that Lydia and Aaron agreed on was that they each wanted to learn more about the issue of systemic racism even after the 21-Day Challenge was over. "I think it's really important to be always learning more about topics like these," Lydia said.

Aaron agreed. "Before we did the 21-Day Challenge," he said, "I had seen a lot of stuff on social media about it. It was all over social media. So, I did look at some of the articles as well as what members of the Oxford community had to say. I got to educate myself on where they were coming from and what their viewpoints were. That was really helpful in my own understanding. I could definitely see myself wanting to learn more about this outside of church."

Aaron shared that after one of the sessions, he and another youth kept the conversation going even after youth group had ended. "We both shared our viewpoints," he said, "even though we had points of differences, it helped us understand where the other person was coming from. I think if we want to change something, we have to acknowledge that the problem exists. That's the only way that we can affect any kind of change: to be able to have the conversation."

Lydia and Aaron both agreed that racism in our society is a big, complicated, and layered issue that none of us can fix on our own. However, having the conversation is an important first step to affecting change, growing closer together as a community, and becoming more faithful, transformed people...if even by one degree at a time.