

# Something to Talk About

## A conversation guide for church leaders

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### I Have a Dream – What’s Yours?

*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/church-leadership/> or <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/something-to-talk-about-archives/>.

It’s been almost two weeks since the hoopla of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday events. Some people called for social justice. Some paused for introspection and reflection. Some attended parades, rallies, or special events. Some enjoyed a day off from work and an extended weekend. Some were angered at the very thought of this holiday. And some spewed hatred.

Allow me to cut to the chase – race is something to talk about. It’s usually something we don’t want to talk about, but it’s something we, church leaders, should talk about.

I remember being moved when, as a child, I heard the now-famous “I Have a Dream” speech by Martin Luther King Jr. I was a white suburbanite child in eastern Los Angeles County in a community and school that was very homogenously white. I was personally sheltered from much of the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Even so, I was then and still am struck by the clarity and simplicity of what is perhaps the best remembered line from that speech.

*“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”*

When I heard those words, and when I think of them today, it strikes me as a no-brainer that we should all have a similar dream when it comes to all people. Yet, the realization of this dream has been slow in coming.

Why should church leaders have this conversation? I want to suggest that it’s not so much to come to any specific conclusion or action, but to get the topic of “*race and our church*” out in the open – to make it something that *can* be talked about openly rather

than relegated to the shadows. It's been my experience that these kinds of conversations can be uncomfortable and intimidating to start but, once the cat's out of the bag, it's much easier thereafter.

If your staff and/or leadership team is not used to these kinds of conversations, let me suggest that you start slowly and with prayer together, recognizing that you are embarking upon territory that, for you, is uncharted.

Here are some ideas for starting your own conversation. Avoid this becoming an exercise in semantics by not focusing in a technical way on the words race, ethnicity, etc.

- Share the issues related to race that you remember dealing with while growing up. What were the issues and how did they impact you then as well as today?
- What are the current demographics of the community surrounding where your church gathers? How have they changed since the church began meeting there? How are they projected to change in the short-term future? What are the implications of all this for the church?
- Recognizing that a rapidly changing community typically changes faster than established organizations in that community, how closely does our congregation mirror the demographic changes in our community, especially as they pertain to race?
- What is your assessment of race relations in your community and surrounding areas? What has improved, what has degraded, and what improvements are needed today?
- What is our responsibility as a church related to race issues in our community?
- How would we gauge our congregation's beliefs and behaviors related to race?
- Do the members of our staff/leadership team(s) have relationships with people of another race? What do we learn from them?
- What have we taught our congregation about race and relationships? Have we been bold in this or timid?

I hope that the relationships within your staff and leadership teams are such that you will feel enough freedom to have this and similar conversations. If you do not – well, that's a topic for another day.

I have a dream – that I and my church will see other people as brothers and sisters in Christ or as people, like me, in need of saving faith in Jesus Christ rather than as the color of their skin. Admittedly, it's a work in progress. What's your dream?

*If you'd like more information on this topic, the content of the 2018 EFCA Theology Conference, "The Gospel, Compassion and Justice, and the EFCA," can be accessed at [www.efca.org/podcasts/efca-theology-podcast](http://www.efca.org/podcasts/efca-theology-podcast). There's lots of good stuff to think and talk about in the recorded sessions.*

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*Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.  
Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at [bob.osborne@efca.org](mailto:bob.osborne@efca.org).*