

Choosing Discomfort: being bold, brave, and loving in the struggle for racial justice stories shared by congregants from the July 30 worship service.

Family stories

When I was a teenager, I was in the car in a parking lot with my dad. Some people walked by loudly talking and casually using curse words. Under his breath, my dad called them “low-lifes”. I didn’t say anything at the time. Since I’ve gotten older, I’ve learned to speak up more with my dad, though I think he has learned to keep thoughts like this inside. I hope to someday make him understand why this way of thinking is wrong. Right now, it seems that he, his wife, and his peers have learned what is not socially acceptable to say but have no moral understanding that guides this.

At a wedding reception for my son and his wife, the bride’s uncle uses the N-word to describe one of his co-workers. I wish I had said, “That’s an offensive term” and invited him to tell me why he used it.

Like Jim Hannum, I too regret that I too often ignored insensitive statements made by my father or uncles which were directed at various ethnic groups and occasionally persons of color. Find a way to respond without damaging a cherished relationship is the challenge. A respected person suggested a response she uses successfully which is, “That is not my experience”. I vow to use that response more.

When visiting relatives, an individual made racist comments about a black athlete on TV. I was a visitor at his house. I didn’t say anything. I wish I had said something.

At Thanksgiving, a relative (who was older) made a racist remark. I wish I had challenged him with more than a sideways look.

My uncle from Georgia and his whole family make explicitly racist statements at our very infrequent family gatherings. I don’t respond for fear of upsetting family relations. I will think about different and better ways to address this in the future.

When people make racial remarks, I try to create some cognitive dissonance rather than argue, as that makes people more defensive and they don’t hear you. Family gatherings are most typical and I am the minority often. My hope is to get them to maybe think about what I said later and challenge their own beliefs about blacks, the Chief, gays, liberals.

At a Thanksgiving dinner at my sister's house, her husband was relating a story about the railroad yards in Chicago. He was a conductor for Burlington Northern Railroad. He referred to a colleague as a "lazy nigger". I was so shocked I didn't say anything, but I let him know with a facial expression that I didn't approve.

My family reunion is in mid-Georgia hosted by an aunt in her 70s who rejects interracial relationship. My cousin's daughter doesn't attend with her black partner and their children. I would offer to host the event, but I live hundreds of miles away. My relatives either stay away or are grateful that my aunt hosts without confronting her. I think I'll start by having dinner with my cousin's family the night before, if possible.