

# Caring Connections

An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling



*Reflections About Racial Justice*

## The Purpose of Caring Connections

*Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling* is written primarily by and for Lutheran practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling, and education. Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable; solidly grounded in the practice of ministry; and theologically probing. *Caring Connections* seeks to reach a broad readership, including chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, others in specialized ministries and — not least — concerned congregational pastors and laity.

*Caring Connections* also provides news and information about activities, events and opportunities of interest to diverse constituencies in specialized ministries.

## Scholarships

When the Inter Lutheran Coordinating Committee disbanded a few years ago, the money from the “Give Something Back” Scholarship Fund was divided between the ELCA and the LCMS. The ELCA has retained the name “Give Something Back” for their fund, and the LCMS calls theirs “The SPM Scholarship Endowment Fund.” These endowments make a limited number of financial awards available to individuals seeking ecclesiastical endorsement and certification/credentialing in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education.

Applicants must:

- have completed one [1] unit of CPE.
- be rostered or eligible for active roster status in the ELCA or the LCMS.
- not already be receiving funds from either the ELCA or LCMS national offices.
- submit an application, along with a financial data form, for committee review.

Applicants must complete the Scholarship Application forms that are available from Ruth Hamilton [ELCA] or Bob Zagore [LCMS]. Consideration is given to scholarship requests after each application deadline. LCMS deadlines are April 1, July 1 and November 1, with awards generally made by the end of the month. ELCA deadline is December 31. Email items to Ruth Hamilton at [ruth.hamilton@elca.org](mailto:ruth.hamilton@elca.org) and to David Ficken [ESC@lcms.org](mailto:ESC@lcms.org).

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## Call for Articles

*Caring Connections* seeks to provide Lutheran Pastoral Care Providers the opportunity to share expertise and insight with the wider community. We want to invite anyone interested in writing an article to please contact one of the co-editors, Diane Greve at [dkgreve@gmail.com](mailto:dkgreve@gmail.com) or Bruce Hartung at [hartungb@sl.edu](mailto:hartungb@sl.edu). Please consider writing an article for us. We sincerely want to hear from you!

### 2020.4 How the Pandemic Has Changed our Practices

#### 2021.1 Specialized Ministries and Their Relationship to the Institutional Church and Its Structures

And, as always, if you haven't already done so, we hope you will subscribe online to *Caring Connections*.

Remember, a subscription is free! By subscribing, you are assured that you will receive prompt notification when each issue of the journal appears on the *Caring Connections* website. This also helps the editors and the editorial board to get a sense of how much interest is being generated by each issue. We are delighted that the number of those who check in is increasing with each new issue. Please visit [www.lutherservices.org/newsletters#cc](http://www.lutherservices.org/newsletters#cc) and click on "Click here to subscribe to the *Caring Connections Journal*." to receive automatic notification of new issues.

# Editorial

## Bruce Hartung

**IT IS AN HONOR** to join Diane Greve as a co-editor of *Caring Connections*. It is humbling to step into the retiring shoes of Lee Joesten who has served as a co-editor these past couple of years, as well as the long line of excellent editors of this journal over the past years. It is exciting to be a part of this journal, now in its 17<sup>th</sup> volume. Over its publication history it has spoken effectively within the broad Lutheran community and outside of it as well. I hope to edit and contribute in a way that builds on the excellence of this journal and maintains its usefulness.

Connecting in this way with *Caring Connections* is a little like returning to some foundational roots after being connected with the LCMS central office for over a decade as the LCMS Director of Ministerial Health/Health and Healing Ministries and the Executive Director of its Commission of Ministerial Growth and Support and another decade plus as faculty at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. Prior to all that I spent some years at the Pastoral Psychotherapy Institute at Lutheran General Hospital, Park Ridge, and (1969–1983) and at the Onondaga Pastoral Counseling Center in Syracuse, NY (1983–1991), and was an active member of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. Now retired, I engage in lots of conversations via Skype, Zoom or telephone with young-in-ministry clergy in the earlier stages of their ministries.

This issue is larger than the usual issue. The killing of George Floyd stirred a nation, and the Board of *Caring Connections* and its editors were stirred as well. Even though there was an issue on racial justice just three issues ago (2019 Volume 4), it seemed time to respond again and relatively quickly. REFLECTIONS ON RACIAL JUSTICE is that response. In it, the reader will find three groups of articles:

1. The first group and largest group of six articles, PERSPECTIVES, bring forward experiential reflections on racial justice themes from many points of viewing.
  - **J. Bernard Kynes** takes us into the heart of his personal experience as an African-American black man. He is a pastoral counselor who returned to his native Ghana and was awakened as to being home. His article, as most all of them in this issue, is personally very moving as well as instructive. Thanks to Mel Jacob for introducing Bernard Kynes to this reading audience and for providing a window into his own connection to Bernard.
  - **Russell Belisle** helps us consider the death of George Floyd as an opportunity to open the door to discuss and address racial issues but as one opportunity in the history of such opportunities in continual action. He explores how chaplaincy and CPE can be used in this continuous action.
  - **David Rojas Martinez** gives us an in-person look at being in the neighborhoods where the post-George Floyd murder brought protests and conflagration. Thanks to LWF for allowing his article to be used.

- **Karl Fay** draws for the reader, offering some of his emotional and personal processes which led to his bringing his artistic skills into play to reflect on author James Baldwin and his contributions. Thanks to Karl for the use of his art as the front cover of this issue!
  - **Edith Finsdaal** offers us poignant learning experiences in and out of her CPE supervision to encourage more openness to and effective engagement of both cultural and racial issues.
  - **Ron Lehenbauer** recounts his own growth toward cultural respect, and makes a vibrant case for celebrating the positive movements forward in developing appreciative recognition of viewpoints, color and culture. Keep in mind the positive movement even in the midst of identifying and working on the problems is a theme for him. He writes having lived over 40 years, many of which as a pastoral counselor, in what he understands to be “one of the most ethnically diverse counties in the world”.
2. Following these articles there are two RESOURCES presented:
- **Joshua Salzberg** introduces the reader to “Lutherans for Racial Justice”, a recently developed group with an LCMS background and focus. He also invites the reader, as I do, to join up.
  - **Tiffany Chaney** introduces the reader to the African Descent Lutheran Association, one of six ELCA ethnic associations providing “fellowship, learning and sharing opportunities”.
3. Finally, there are four BOOK ENCOUNTERS, as much a personal encounter and they are traditional book reviews:
- **John Schumacher** offers *White Fragility*;
  - **Nancy Wigdahl** introduces us to *My Grandmother’s Hands*;
  - **Nick Shults** opens the door to *Bonhoeffer’s Black Jesus*;
  - I share the stunningness and challenge of *Christian White Privilege*.

I hope the reader finds this issue of *Caring Connections* helpful and challenging. It is a privilege to offer this to you, the reader.

Finally, I note the recent death of Edward James “Jim” Rivett the former coordinator of LCMS Prison Ministry and 2016 recipient of the “Christus in Mundo” award that is given for significant contributions in Specialized Pastoral Ministry. For 20 years he served inmates and staff at federal prisons in Tucson, Memphis, Phoenix and Marion (IL). In 1987 he received the U.S. Department of Justice Federal Prison System’s Assistant Director’s Award. He was the author of *The Prison and Jail Ministry of the LCMS*. His death was on July 8, 2020 in Marion, IL at the age of 72. He is survived by his spouse, Susan, three sons and two sisters. A memorial service was held on July 20. Jim now awaits the resurrection.

To all of our readers: Be Well!

# I Am, Ahmaud Arbery

**Bernard Kynes**

## Introducing the Author

Bernard has been a friend for over 25 years. We met on a July day as U.S. Army Reserves (USAR) Chaplains in the hot pines of Ft. Gordon, outside of Augusta, GA. My Field Hospital Unit from south Florida was doing two weeks of annual training. The Unit was a motley blend of races (black, brown, white, and a touch of red) and filled with credentialed medical professionals and support people who efficiently set up and ran a hospital in the field. Bernard was assigned out of Atlanta to assist the mission.

A busy man, Bernard was the pastor of a C.M.E. congregation, the father of four school age children, and enrolled at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta and in the clinical training program at the Georgia Association for Pastoral Care, working in their Th.D. program. I liked him immediately as we shared the discomforts of the setting and heat. I clearly remember seeing Bernard during a break reading Moltmann. There seemed a major incongruence chillin' with Jurgen Moltmann in a hot USAR tent?!

Our relationship grew as we pursued AAPC (American Association of Pastoral Counselors) credentials in the Southeast. We reconnected frequently at Regional Meetings at Kanuga, N.C. or at a National AAPC meeting. I met his wife, Faye, and he met mine, Mary. Over the years he would refer acquaintances to me in Central Florida where I was developing Lutheran Counseling Services.

When street riots in early Spring were occurring in Atlanta after the news of Ahmaud Arbery's slaying, I e-mailed Bernard in order to check on his and his family's safety and well-being around both the turmoil of injustice and Covid-19. He quickly responded with a "we're okay" and attached an 'essay' he had recently written mostly for himself. Relieved they were okay, I read the essay. Then, in asking for his permission to share with the readers of *Caring Connections*, he told me he had written it on Mother's Day in three hours.

His essay moved me. I realized I had called Bernard my friend for nearly three decades, and I was so unaware, even insensitive, to his world. I knew much about his accomplishments, his sensitive personality, and the respect he has earned from so many. Yet, I knew very little about the very real world in which he and too many others live. I realized the effects in me of the killing of Trayvon Martin eight years ago (having occurred not that far from where I lived and worked) were absorbed in a "life goes on" fashion.

Thank you, Bernard, for stirring up my complacency and allowing me to share the essay with others! What has amazed me, also, was that my friend's Mother's Day essay was written before the killing of George Floyd and the unfolding of the Black Lives Matter movement.

—Mel Jacob is the founder and developer of Lutheran Counseling Center, Orlando, and served as its Executive Director over a period of 27 years.

## Introduction

As a mental and spiritual health professional who provides psychotherapy daily for individuals from diverse populations, I listen to and hear the depth of pain and suffering my clients experience on a daily, even moment by moment basis. Their pain and suffering are connected with trauma experiences from their personal

narrative both historical and in the present moment. I offer a non-judgmental space so that they are able to process their thoughts and their emotions reflectively and confidentially.

And then, we tragically and traumatically lost Mr. Ahmaud Arbery on Sunday February 23rd of this year. Not surprising we are just recently seeing the video of the brutal and senseless killing of this young brother! As an African American and black man, not only does this modern-day lynching and killing stimulate the existential anxieties about living today in a society and community where the covert and overt message is implied, 'you don't count; your life is of no intrinsic worth and value,' but also it stimulates psychological traumas of the narrative that reside in one's unconscious.

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### Existential Anxieties: A Clinical Experience

I have seven therapy groups with 6 to 8 members per group. Three are all African American women, two are mixed religiously, racially, men and women, heterosexual and homosexual; and, two are African American. The men groups, like the others, meet weekly or bi-monthly for one hour and twenty minutes. The men groups have been meeting for two years. Some brothers remain for a short period of time and others have remained to this day while new ones have entered. These men are well-educated and very successful in their professional lives. They are white-collar and blue-collar workers.

They are fathers, brothers, sons, uncles, married, single, divorced, gay and straight and range in age from mid-thirties to mid-fifties. A constant theme inevitably circles back around to is the overwhelming stress they feel in their bodies, particularly in their 'guts and chests.' There is constant pressure around daily thoughts about how they must exist and live as men in their 'black' bodies!

In some cases, they recount insidious demands in their places of employment, especially in corporate America structures, to prove their competence to their white co-workers. This is expressed more often during an annual review and a subjective evaluation usually from their white supervisor.

Concerned about their existence as human beings on a daily basis creates anxieties that live in their bodies. Their concern impacts everything from the functions of their essential organs to their inability to get a full night of sleep. These anxieties include symptoms of nervousness, insomnia, restlessness, fear, irregular bowel movements, worry, racing thoughts and loss of appetite to name a few. Just the other day in my neighborhood's Nextdoor Post, a brother wrote: 'I am black man and about to go for a run ... don't kill me.' The concern for our existence as black men is a daily grind. This is our self-fact!

## Psychological Trauma: A Story, May 2018.

I was attending a conference for the GA Marriage and Family Therapist Association on Jekyll Island; Glynn County is in the neighborhood of Jekyll Island. It was Friday afternoon, May 4, 2018. My wife and I decided to go for a swim at the beach. As we headed back to our room, I decided to swim a few laps in the pool. I was the only African American in sight. In the pool was a white family composed of a father and his young son and daughter. As I entered the pool, the father began to sing, “Marco Polo ... it’s time for us to get out of the water children.” They exit the pool. Inside, I smiled and outside I pretended not to notice. I went about swimming my several laps.

Saturday afternoon, May 5, 2018, I decided to return to the beach for one final swim before leaving for dinner. As I entered the water—again the only black person in sight other than my wife—I noticed 3 white males about one-hundred yards away from me. They were playing with a beach ball (probably not paying me any attention) and having fun. Then the following sequence of thoughts raced through my mind. “Bernard, you better move further away just in case these white boys wan’na start some mess... man, relax and breathe ... you’re always teaching others how to relax and breathe, now you do it... Stop looking over there at them, breathe and relax ... I gon’na move twenty-five yards further away.” I moved and my mind kept racing with thoughts and my body could not relax—I was having an anxiety attack.

Next, I gave way to the anxiety. I got out of the water. I felt angry, defeated and sad. I felt like a fraud—I teach others how to relax in the moment through mindfulness breathing, and in the moment, I could not do it myself. I said nothing about this to my wife. I instead suffered in silence. I was more than ready to return home. When I returned home that Sunday, I went to sit in an infrared sauna for an hour and then received a massage for an hour. The following Friday, I would meet with colleagues where, again, I would be the lone African American. However, these are friends with friendly faces and compassionate and empathic hearts. We always check in to update the group regarding our well-being. Without hesitation or a second thought, I shared my experience. They wept. I wept. I felt relieved and still psychologically traumatized. There was a movement toward self-forgiveness by means of surrendering to my pain and suffering. Weeping!

Monthly, five of us African American friends and colleagues meet for fellowship and support. A few weeks after my experience at the pool and the beach, I shared the experience. They processed the experience with me, by means of openly and vulnerably sharing equally painful moments in their own lives. We, at the end of our 2-hour fellowship, sat in moments of silence. We ended our fellowship by hugging one another with masculine gentleness and feminine firmness, in other words, with

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“Bernard, you better move further away just in case these white boys wan’na start some mess... man, relax and breathe ... you’re always teaching others how to relax and breathe, now you do it.”

strength and compassion. In this context, masculine gentleness refers to our ability to reflect logically and rationally as human beings who are capable of thinking intellectually through our individual narratives. Feminine firmness refers to our capacity to simultaneously experience our emotions and feelings by embracing our illogical and irrational selves openly and holding each other without touching each other. In the words of Howard Thurman, we were “completely vulnerable and completely secure!”

These hugs from these black men offered me a deep sense of emotional stability, by transforming my earlier feelings of intimidation and fear, shame and guilt, anger and despair, helplessness and powerlessness into a newfound sense of personal affirmation, confidence, confirmation and restoration of my intrinsic worth and my sense of God-given dignity as a human being and a black man!

I have relived similar experiences of my early childhood during the 50's and 60's growing up in a small South Georgia town. I was familiar with the psychological encounters of intimidation, fear and segregation. For instance, we de-segregated our schools in 1969–1970 statewide. We had to leave our beloved community. We traveled by bus across the “railroad tracks.” A marker that divided where whites and blacks lived. Today, it's called Redlining. Still again, for example, I would sit in class, knowing the answer to a question that my teacher would ask me and refuse to answer because I was thinking: “Bernard, don't answer that question just in case you're wrong, so that you don't look dumb in front of these white folks.” My stomach would ache; my chest was tight, like I was holding my breath; and, my head dropped in shame!

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We ended our fellowship by hugging one another with masculine gentleness and feminine firmness, in other words, with strength and compassion.

### A Healing Experience: Spiritual Transformation

“God of our weary tears, God of our silent tears, Thou who has brought us thus far on the way; Thou who has by Thy might Led us into the light, Keep us forever in the path, we pray. Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee, Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee, Shadowed beneath Thy hand, May we forever stand, True to our God, True to our native land.” Stanza 3 from “Lift Every Voice and Sing” written by James Weldon Johnson.

Last year I traveled to the native land, Ghana. My first trip to the continent. It was the Year of the Return, commemorating the 400 years (1619–2019) of our enslaved ancestors from the Motherland to the Americas, but in particular to North America. Without going into the whole 10-day journey, one part of my spiritual transformation took place while sitting on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, from Africa! In the photo on the right, I felt overwhelmed by the spiritual presence of

the ancestors! The air, soil, and water gave me a new transcendent conscious awakening! HOME!

I noticed that the waters on this side of the Atlantic seemed more forceful, a spiritual force of mother nature that hit the rocks with power and fury. It has been reported that approximately 40 million enslaved ancestors died during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to the North America. It was here that I gained insight about my experience of May 5, 2018 in the Atlantic at Jekyll Island.

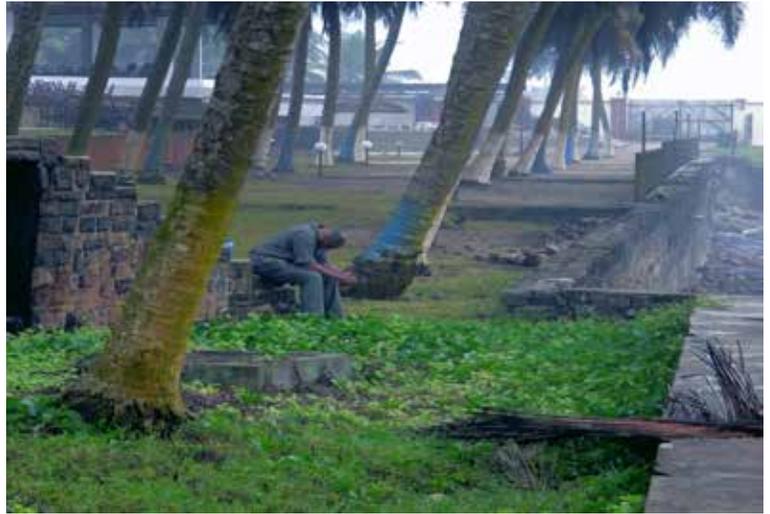


Photo taken by Gary and Gwen Henderson in Accra, Ghana, July 2019

As I was experiencing the anxiety attack while in the water, (wondering if the three white males were going to attack me) I became aware that I was experiencing a fraction of the psychological suffering that my ancestors experienced on those ships and by those souls that rest in the bottom of the Atlantic. The brutal trauma and the vicious evil torture that they endured not to mention the brutality they experienced in the Elmina and Cape Coastal Castles before they were placed on the ships enveloped my body, on a cellular level, and flooded my brain, on a neurological level; replayed!

The internal suffering that I was experiencing struck, in the words of Thurman, “at the core of my being.” Thurman goes on to express (and I am paraphrasing here) that it is in such a moment that the God in me and the God before me becomes one beating pulse beat. Heartbeat! In different words, it is in these throes, the pangs of the moment in my own agony, from my own existential, psychological, spiritual and relational self that I meet the Eternal in a transcendent space and place of a new discovery of a new self-fact! Now, in the words of Thurman, “I must introduce this new fact about myself into the image that I had of myself before I knew this fact!” I can never be the same before this moment; for now, I am my ancestors! And, I am connected with the ancestors like never before! I am reborn!

### Conclusion: I Am, Ahmaud Arbery

Mr. Arbery was, and remains in spirit, an outstanding young black man! He was health conscious, running a few miles to stay in shape. He was an outstanding athlete and an intellectual young man, and well-liked in his community. I am Ahmaud Arbery because I am equally as vulnerable to have the same fatal experience. I am Ahmaud Arbery in that as an older African American man, I can potentially forget about my surroundings and assume that I am safe from such hideous acts of violence, and not just physically, but also psychologically.

Each of us must honor Mr. Arbery's legacy (and the Ancestors) through our own personhood. We must continue to be moral agents of change through the transformative power of love and compassion; while, simultaneously ensuring that we stand connected to the pathways that lead to social justice.

I shall honor those Ancestors who survived the enslaved and forced journey to this side of the Atlantic. They call us to recognize their legacy of endurance, perseverance, resiliency, strength, vigor, spirituality, intelligence and courage to dare to survive.

I am, Ahmaud Arbery!

For the Ancestors, Namaste' and Ashe'



*J. Bernard Kynes, Sr. is an  
LMFT ACPE Psychotherapist  
and an AAMFT Clinical Member.*

# Chaplaincy and Race

**Russell Belisle**

**IT WAS AUGUST OF 2005** when I began my clinical pastoral education training. Throughout my pastoral career, I had served as a parish pastor, a high school religion teacher, an athletic coach. In each of these areas of ministry, I had found satisfaction as I served our Lord and Savior. Now, after 17 years of pastoral ministry, I was beginning my chaplaincy training. My supervisor had pulled me aside and mentioned that I had experiences that some of the others residents lacked and that he expected me to take a leadership role.

It was during our second week of training that I experienced my first Interpersonal Group (IPG) session. During these sessions, we would sit in a circle and wait for someone to speak about a topic that was important to him or her. These meetings usually began with a few minutes of silence, and at first, I found the silence to be uncomfortable. It took a few experiences with IPG before I realized that sitting in silence got rid of our distractions. It was the silence that allowed that which is under our skin to rise to the top and be heard. The silence gave voice to what we had been avoiding. It was not until someone was brave enough to share their thoughts that the silence was broken. This process often involved allowing one's self to become vulnerable and trusting that the group was a safe place to share our feelings.

Our group was a cross section of Christian denominations, ages, genders, and races. All were well educated, and each had come from different region of the country. Our experiences varied, as did our different concerns and expectations. As a new group, it took a little time to develop a trust relationship among the members. It was with this group that I learned what it was like to be a part of IPG. Our sessions would last for an hour and we discussed a variety of topics. About once a month, when cell phones and pagers were silent, blinds were closed so no one could look out of the windows, and we had nothing to distract us, there was one topic that would rise to surface and demand to be discussed. That topic was race relationships.

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About once a month, when cell phones and pagers were silent, blinds were closed so no one could look out of the windows, and we had nothing to distract us, there was one topic that would rise to surface and demand to be discussed. That topic was race relationships.

I had experienced this type of discussion in the past, but now it was different. In the past, most of the honest discussion that I had about race relations involved talking with a group of people who looked like me. There were those who do not look like me with whom I had open and honest discussions on race; but that group was small and infrequent. Most of those discussions were not real conversations.

They involved someone telling me their thoughts on race relationships while I was just audience to what they said. I did not get the feeling that they were interested in my thoughts. This was the first time I experienced people admitting faults, bias, and indifference when it comes to race. Our IPG discussions occurred in the city where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. They were uncomfortable, awkward, honest, and productive. Those sacrosanct discussions that Blacks have only with other Blacks were shared with Whites. The reverse is also true about sacrosanct discussions among Whites being shared with Blacks. I thought that these were breakthrough moments. I am of the belief that such moments are achieved only when all parties allow themselves to become vulnerable before each other.

Looking at contemporary times, we find ourselves in a national IPG about race. With the COVID-19 virus, much of our regular entertainment has been put on pause. There are no live sports, movies, or live theater. With limited gathering, sheltering at home, and social distancing, we have gotten rid of many sources of distraction. As we sit as a nation, what do we have living under our skin that is waiting to rise to the surface? Race relationships in our lives, in our neighborhoods, and in our nation are begging to be discussed. The recent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd helped act as a catalyst to push the topic of race to the surface. We must deal with race, now that it is in front of us and everyone knows.

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As we sit as a nation, what do we have living under our skin that is waiting to rise to the surface? Race relationships in our lives, in our neighborhoods, and in our nation are begging to be discussed.

I believe that there are three ways to address our racial issue in the United States. First, treat it the way we treat our need for a new pair of shoes. When the soles of our shoes are worn, we get new ones and the issue is solved until the new shoes wear out and the issue has to again be addressed. This seems to be the preferred method of our nation. From the time of reconstruction until this very day, we discuss race and develop solutions that last until they do not last, and then we are surprised that we have a problem with race. This results in new discussions and solutions that will last for a while. Some may call this the evolution of a circle.

Second, treat the solution to racial issues in America as a one-event solution. “We freed the slaves years ago, get over it.” This obviously does not work. The one-time solution worked well with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His death on the cross was a one-time event that made satisfaction for the sins of all people. We have not yet found an event in American history that matches the crucifixion and resurrection.

Finally, the continual action method is available to us. With this method, we are intentional about addressing issues of race in our lives, and we make a regular effort to examine self and speak openly about the subject of race.

During my experience with IPG, our groups held two sessions a week. While we had this experience consistently, at least one session a month was a discussion on race. The reason race was discussed at least once a month was because there was a need. The last time we had a discussion on race, we may not have solved all of our issues and moved on to something else. Therefore, in future sessions, the need still existed to resolve our concerns. The advantage that we had was that we were willing to continue the discussion month after month. At the beginning of a new unit, we picked up new residents who added to the experience. What we had was a continuous action. It was not dropped because we discussed it in the past, nor did the discussion run out of energy.

Throughout the history of the United States of America, there have been events that opened the door for honest racial discussion. Reconstruction after the Civil War (1865–1877), the Civil Rights movement beginning with the death of Emmett Till (August 28, 1955) until it ended after the death of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (April 4, 1968), and the election of President Barack H. Obama (November 4, 2008), are examples of events that opened that door. During these times, there was curiosity and interest about those of the other race. During these times, there was hope that things would get better and that we would work our way through the troubles of the past. It is during these times that we see progress and the beginning of change. Then something happens. Our efforts do not endure and our efforts are punctuated with a period. We then stop.

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It is during these times that we see progress and the beginning of change. Then something happens. Our efforts do not endure and our efforts are punctuated with a period. We then stop.

Today I see America presented with a door to discuss and address our racial issues. The event that opened this door, the death of George Floyd (May 25, 2020). During this time I have heard great speeches, seen the banning of the confederate flag at NASCAR events, professional sports teams consider changing their name, and racist monuments toppled. I have witnessed conversations and discussions about the state of racial affairs in America; and this time it is not just Black and White people. I have witnessed anger, awkwardness, and those who were uncomfortable with the discussion. That is all a part of having a national IPG. My question is how long will it last, and how far will we go?

What chaplaincy has taught me is that we need to continue the action that has brought us this far. At times, it will be painful and mistakes will be made, but continuous action is what is needed to keep open that door of racial awareness forced open by the death of George Floyd. I am of the opinion that the conversation needs to spill into our churches, schools, hospitals, and places of employment. How will this look? I suggest small group setting where each member tells about a racial encounter in their life (the encounter does not have to be negative). Fill in the blank open-ended questions are good (i.e. when I think

about race in my community I feel \_\_\_\_\_.) Speak openly in mixed racial company about experiences with law enforcement, or even invite members of law enforcement to your discussion. Practice the office of the keys and use confession and absolution. Be intentional and continue to discuss.



*Throughout his career, Chaplain Russell Belisle has served a number of racially diverse ministries as a teacher, pastor, and chaplain. One of his current activities is helping congregations and organization with the conversation on race.*

# We Cannot Go Back to Normal

**David Rojas Martínez**

*This article is used with the kind permission of the Lutheran World Federation.*

## “Mama, I can’t breathe”

It is Ordinary Season, and in Minnesota the sun shines late into Compline as we live in a haze of sweaty clothes, sun-kissed skin, and explosive rumbling storms.

Four weeks ago, George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis. On the following day, as brimming storm clouds descended over Minneapolis, my neighborhood caught fire. Righteous anger ignited people into the streets, as centuries of oppression erupted.

One week prior to the uprising, I began working at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in the Longfellow neighborhood of South Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA as a deacon with the lofty title of Community Engagement and Education Coordinator.

In the early morning hours following the first night of revolutionary actions, I found myself in a daze of broken glass and smoke as I walked the short distance from my apartment to the church building. The sound of helicopters was constant, and I knew that my city was ashes of glowing embers ready to re-ignite.

In this new morning, ashes coated anything falsely shiny. Dripping water from fire extinguishers drowned false narratives. As I walked on the sacred ground of the Lakota native people, now called Minnesota, I had no prayers left. And so, I challenged the Divine to end up with a scratchy throat and burning eyes and to shout into the void until SHE was hoarse and yelling into an indifferent world, “MAMA! I CAN’T BREATHE!”

Once at church, I spent daylight hours prepping the building alongside strangers. We all knew a second night of uprising would mean our doors needed to open once again as a medic station. All day inside the ancient building without electricity, sweat dripped as we tried our best to organize a generous flood of donations.

When evening arrived, I sat outside to catch my breath and welcomed a gentle-yet-strong breeze. The seemingly peaceful eventide deceived me however, as dusk settled in the frightening noises of helicopters and popping began, again. Smells of fear — pepper spray — that stung eyes and throats wafted around us, and I stood on the



The doors of Holy Trinity in Minneapolis remained opened 24-hours supplying first aid to protestors and food to the community. Photo: Holy Trinity Lutheran Church/D. Rojas Martínez

edge of our property unable to do anything but observe and bear witness. The light, which was bright, was quickly darkened in smoke.

People dazedly ran towards our doors in hope that we could offer help, it is then that I realized there were no classes in seminary to teach me how to pour milk on the eyes and mouths of tear-gassed teens.

Underneath a tree, I saw a man my age, who on any other occasion would have appeared to me as not easily shaken, he was broken and crying. All I could do was kneel beside him and repeat, “You’re alive. You’re breathing. I’m here with you.”

I write all of this to share with you from my air-conditioned office. Today, my office is a space that although mostly bare, no longer has boarded up windows, and beautiful rays of sun seep in. I am no longer working 24-hour days, and our church community is no longer in survival mode.

Over the last few weeks, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church learned how to streamline our emergency ministry offering basic supplies to offset the burned out stores in our neighborhood. But, I am beginning to wane away from what now seems to be a lifetime ago because I am once again falling prey to the status quo.

Due to my particularities of being a Mexican immigrant in-and-out-and-in-between-status in the U.S., plenty of people in my circles have told me that I am not called or perhaps not yet. Plenty others have told me I am called — for such a time as this. I, myself, doubt. At Lauds, when I make the sign of the cross and before the day gets going in all of its rush, I usually believe that I am called, to this place.

My immigration status in the US is a big mess I am attempting to wash away like well-meaning folks who washed away the street art made by demonstrators. In my rush for normalcy, I know assuredly that our African-American siblings have endured centuries of oppression in this country and that I cannot allow myself to be lulled back into inaction — normalcy. We cannot allow these modern-day lynchings, the terrorizing of black bodies to continue.

If we say we are not racist, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just. We must confess. We must repent. There is much to do.



*Deacon David Rojas Martinez is a deacon of the Lutheran Diaconal Association (LDA) and Community Engagement and Education Coordinator at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregation. He is pictured here with his mother after his consecration as a deacon of the LDA.*

## Drawing in the Margins

**Karl Fay**

**FOR THOSE OF YOU** I haven't met yet, my name is Karl Fay.

I am a Jesus follower, an artist, a husband, a father of four, and the Senior Pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Palatine, IL.

In the margins of pastoring and parenting over the past four years, I have been actively creating a body of artwork that is united around a common style and approach I call "word art."

What is a "word art portrait"? It is a portrait of an individual in which that individual's original words come together to help form their likeness and capture their essence. Among the people I've portrayed in this way are: Martin Luther King Jr., Maya Angelou, Desmond Tutu, Fred Rogers, Freddie Mercury, Eugene Peterson, Amelia Earhart, John Muir, Pablo Picasso, Mother Teresa, James Baldwin, and more. You can view my work at my portfolio site: [artgives.life](http://artgives.life). If you'd like to learn about prints and shirts displaying my work, you can go to [dandy.world](http://dandy.world).

Why do I create "word art portraits"? In short, I have to create! I've been making art ever since I was able to hold a crayon. My preferred medium is still drawing. While I have done extensive work to integrate art into my public ministry as a pastor and my service to the community at-large, this body of artwork is for me an act of recreation and play. The refreshment and inspiration I receive as I research these individuals and create these portraits is invaluable to me personally as I live out my other callings.

What do I hope viewers will experience as they look at my art?

I want people to slow down and get drawn into an encounter with the depicted individual and their words in such a way that it provokes wonder at the One who made us all and compassion and empathy toward the unique and diverse people with whom we share this planet. If I can spread good things by sharing what inspires me and at the end of the day we can all be filled with a bit more wonder and compassion, I count it a win!

How do I choose my subjects? I choose people that either have already inspired and shaped my life in some way or who are recommended to me by others and eventually come to inspire me as I research and depict them. James Baldwin came as a recommendation from my cousin, Julia, who is bi-racial. I considered quotes of his that she shared with me over the better part of a year before it felt like the time was right to create a portrait of him.

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The refreshment and inspiration I receive as I research these individuals and create these portraits is invaluable to me personally as I live out my other callings.



- Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.  
—*As Much Truth As One Can Bear* in *The New York Times Book Review*
- I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain.  
—*Notes of a Native Son*
- Our crown has already been bought and paid for. All we have to do is wear it.  
—Toni Morrison's tribute to James Baldwin, *The New York Times*
- American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.  
—*A Talk to Teachers*
- People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.  
—*Stranger in the Village*

My invitation to you is to slow down, encounter these words and this face, engage in somber reflection trusting that meaningful change will happen and hope will rise.



*Karl Fay is the Senior Pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Palatine, IL.*

# The Truth Shall Make Us Free!

**Edith Finsaadal**

**I WANT TO BE CLEAR** that I am essentially writing for Caucasians. In my experience, we are often the most hesitant/resistant in terms of naming and claiming our isms such as racism and culturism. My goal is to encourage our openness and willingness to deal with our cultural and racial issues.

I was fortunate to be raised in a family and country, Norway, where interest in other countries and cultures was instilled in me from when I was a small child. I had to memorize and recite “The Little Bible”, John 3:16 when I was sitting on my stool milking cows together with Berthe, my father’s aunt. Berthe also told and read me stories about children in other countries, e.g. Ethiopia and China. When I started school, the celebration of United Nations birthday, October 24, 1948, became an annual event for pupils and teachers. We learned that Trygve Lie, a Norwegian politician and government official, was the first Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), and that we were called to continue his important work.

The above is a happy part of my story that inspires me in my work with international students and helps me learn from them. A sad and disturbing part I realized years later is my internalized bias and prejudices in the areas of gender, race and culture. My first eye opener came when I had the choice between going to a female physician and continuing with a male physician. I discovered that I immediately doubted the woman doctor and felt nervous at the thought of trusting her with my care.

The above eye opener happened when I was a young seminary student. When I later became a CPE supervisory student at Advocate Lutheran General hospital in 1989, I engaged in deep reflection and awareness work to resolve gender and other biases. I did not fully resolve them. Decades later, I discovered that I still had my biases and prejudices despite intensive work with myself, my theology, values and belief systems, supervising and working with a number of students from other countries and cultures.

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Decades later, I discovered that I still had my biases and prejudices despite intensive work with myself, my theology, values and belief systems, supervising and working with a number of students from other countries and cultures.

A few especially poignant learning experiences stand out. My husband, Eric, our dog Idun, and I arrived at O’Hare International Airport to fly to Norway for Christmas with Scandinavian airlines. I immediately noticed a Black man at the airlines’ check-in counter. My heart sank. “What will he know about flying to Scandinavia, especially with a dog?” was the first thought that ran through my mind.

In all my years of flying to Norway, there had always been only white Scandinavians at the counter. Luckily, I recognized my prejudice. We proceeded to the check-in counter. The Black man did a superb job of checking in our dog, my husband, and I. Eric and I proceeded to the gate and our Black check-in man went away with our dog. When we got to our gate, he appeared again, and started making phone calls. I was really surprised. He spoke perfect Norwegian. I went and engaged him about his knowledge of Norwegian. He happily shared that he had been adopted from Africa by a family in a suburb of Oslo when he was a child, and that he enjoyed having a job where he could utilize his knowledge of Norwegian and English both. I learned a humbling lesson: Here I had been, immediately feeling nervous, making assumptions, and questioning competence when I arrived at the airport and saw the Black man at the Scandinavian check-in counter and everything I experienced with and from him was positive. I realized that I still had work to do in freeing myself from internalized bias and prejudice. The above event happened almost 14 years ago. I had been a certified CPE supervisor for 12 years.

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Here I had been, immediately feeling nervous, making assumptions, and questioning competence when I arrived at the airport and saw the Black man at the Scandinavian check-in counter and everything I experienced with and from him was positive.

A couple of years later, I had another sobering experience; my head and heart realization of my culturism. I needed to consult a medical specialist. I called a physician referral service. The lady I spoke with introduced me to 2 possible physician groups. One was 2 female doctors who had graduated from Northwestern University. The other group was 3 female doctors who had graduated from universities in the Philippines. Where do you think my immediate confidence went? If I had a chance to hear your answers, my guess is that most of you would have been right. My confidence went to the doctors from Northwestern. What for me was striking about this experience is that the only thing I knew about these doctors was the country they were from; the USA and the Philippines. I knew nothing about their grades, if they had had patient complaints filed against them, or what their records and reputation were. I was really struck by my immediate cultural bias. The event became a life and profession changing experience for me. I realized that besides racism in our countries and world, our existence and relationships are marked by cultural discrimination and prejudice also.

It's been a long process of becoming aware of and trying to resolve my isms. I had been working on my sexism for 30 plus years when it again raised its ugly head. I flew back to Chicago from Norway through Munich, Germany, during a heavy snow day. The plane had to be de-iced several times. The snow kept falling down and our departure from Munich became increasingly more delayed. A pleasant woman's voice came on the speaker. It was the captain. I was immediately aware. Wow, how is this going to go? A woman captain on the plane and in a horrific, bad snow storm. Luckily,

I immediately recognized my bias and could laugh at myself. Obviously, a captain's ability to navigate and handle our flight had nothing to do with male or female appearances. My internalized captain stereotype was right in my face: The handsome, tall white male. That was the captain type I had experienced the most during my life and developed immediate trust and confidence in. Once I realized this, I managed to calm my nervousness. My flight eventually got on its way. Our captain spoke to her passengers several times and greeted us with a smile when we had landed safely in Chicago.

Why am I telling the above personal and professional stories? For 3 main reasons. One, I believe we share the experience of having internalized racism, sexism, culturism, genderism, other isms, and that we need to be open and willing to learn from them in order to become freer from biases and prejudices that we live with and which continue, especially if/when we are unaware of them. Two, we are born into a racist, culturist, sexist and other isms world where biases and prejudices are under our skin before we consciously know it. Three, I think habitual biased and prejudiced ways of perceiving, reasoning, judging and relating are powerful and challenging to resolve in ourselves, personally and pastorally, and in our multitude of relationships. I am essentially limiting my focus and range in this paper to culture and race while also touching on gender.

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I think habitual biased and prejudiced ways of perceiving, reasoning, judging and relating are powerful and challenging to resolve in ourselves, personally and pastorally, and in our multitude of relationships.

Other isms like speciesism could easily be added as could abusive behavior and lack of respect for the earth and the waters that feed us. A friend of mine who is a scuba diver recently shared how plastic from cruise ships sometimes choke sea animals who get caught in it. We can learn the same from recognized nature magazines. By mentioning this, my intent is to encourage us to examine our relationships with God's creation as a whole, examine and explore how we may be more caring, accountable, and respectful in all our creaturely relationships. Chances are that bias and prejudice in our human relationships may spill over into and/or reflect our lacking care and respect for the earth and other animals. We are all in this together.

Theologically, I am inspired by Sally McFague and Richard Rohr. I resonate with McFague's view that humans, the earth, the world, the universe is God's body (McFague, 1993). With my Norwegian Lutheran folk church background, I am at home in Rohr's recognition of the sacredness of the world as a whole, "...the presence of the divine in literally 'everything' and 'everyone' (Rohr, 2019, p.18). From the above perspectives, bias, prejudice toward any and all human beings, any and all races and cultures, any and all life, is bias and prejudice against God whose personal and universal presence and care through Christ includes all of creation (Rohr, 2019). "We share a universal pulse" (Bekoff, 2002, p.197).

Considering my early positive learning about other races and cultures, how and why did I become biased and prejudiced? I think it initially happened because I started my life on this earth as a vulnerable, receptive child who more or less automatically was shaped and influenced by my environments. The depth psychologist Carl Gustav Jung did not provide us with a detailed theory of child development. However, he was clear that from when we are born until we are adolescents, we have little or no consciousness of our own; we soak up, swallow and internalize the consciousness of our immediate caregivers, persons in our lives that we are surrounded by (Campbell, 1971). I think this is true. Norway is now a liberal country with strong equality between women and men, educationally, politically and otherwise. It was not always so when I was a child. One time when my mother was ill, my father assumed house and home chores such as going down on his knees and cleaning the floors. He instructed my older sister and me not to tell anybody that he did this. My sense is that he thought he might be disregarded as a man for doing women's work. Church-wise, I grew up in what might be called the Bible belt of Norway. The bishop who sat for life was strongly against the ordination of women, a view that was shared by dominant men in the church and in the community. Any wonder that I learned to think that men were more important than women and the preferred sex educationally, intellectually, pastorally, and professionally?

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[Jung] was clear that from when we are born until we are adolescents, we have little or no consciousness of our own; we soak up, swallow and internalize the consciousness of our immediate caregivers, persons in our lives that we are surrounded by.

Culturally, I learned early through primary education that there are some countries better than others in the world. This country, the U.S.A. was the country I learned the most about besides Norway and Europe. This was the most highly regarded country where people were successful and wealthy. I had extended family here that reflected and represented some of this admired and desired position. The Philippines as well as other Asian countries, I learned little about. As I became a young adult, I learned to refer to Asian and African countries as underdeveloped and developing countries, and that countries in South and Central America were these kinds of countries also. Western Europe and this country were the developed countries in the world and thereby the superior ones. Any wonder that I immediately would think and feel that female physicians who had graduated from Northwestern, a prestigious university I learned about while still living in Norway, would be more competent and qualified than women physicians from under-developed and developing Philippines?

Racism: I generally learned to have more appreciation and respect for African Americans in Norway than I have experienced in this country. It shook us to the core when Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King was killed. How could this horrible act

happen in America, a country with goodness and freedom? A few years later, I came to this country as a seminary student. My father's uncle picked me up at the JF Kennedy airport and we drove through parts of Brooklyn. I saw poverty and run-down neighborhoods and streets that I had never imagined. I heard words about black people living there, what they did and how they were, and quickly realized that they often were seen and perceived as inferior to white people. I was introduced to systemic racism in this country as in Norway and in other countries. My first African American student at Northwestern Lake Forest hospital, a woman, helped me learn more. We did a presentation to the ethics committee about understanding and accepting human differences. The night before our presentation, I read a list of white privileges. One privilege was: I can be pretty sure that if I need to go to the emergency room I will get a Band-Aid that is sensitive to my skin color. I was taken aback and felt embarrassed reading this. I had never thought of this before and I had been working in hospital emergency rooms for at least 15 years. I shared this white privilege with my African American student the next morning. She looked at me and said: "Edith, I have known that since I was 5 years old."

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I think we all have these stories and I want to invite us all to become more conscious and aware.

Why am I sharing so much about my own personal professional background? I am doing it because I think my story with bias and prejudice may connect with your stories of bias and prejudice. I think we all have these stories and I want to invite us all to become more conscious and aware. My goal and I believe our goal is that we may all learn to relate and work more helpfully with others and ourselves, culturally and racially, in the multitude of our human and other relationships. Some of you may remember Warren Saunders. He was a newscaster here in Chicago and had a successful career as a teacher, community leader and reporter. He was Black. He spoke at a psychological conference I attended and made the following statement: "As long as I think that I as a Black person cannot do anything as good as or better than a white person, I am still a recovering racist." Besides realizing more of Saunders' racial reality and experience, I feel grateful for his use of words. I felt he gave me language for describing myself as a white person and for understanding where Black persons may feel they are coming from sometimes. I think I am a recovering racist, i.e. a white person, born into and influenced by a racist world that I participate in continuing, unconsciously if not consciously. I am not at a level of development, emotionally, spiritually, relationally where I can say that I am free from racism or from culturism or sexism or other isms. I may have less humbling "aha" experiences now than a few years ago where my internalized personal, pastoral or professional bias and prejudice is right in my face. However, I imagine that I will continue to be challenged to learn and become aware as I engage and relate with persons from other cultural and racial backgrounds than mine.

What is my/our way(s) in terms of changing and becoming freer from internalized cultural and racial biases and prejudices? I think a lot can be said about this and the learning that can be involved. In this context I wish to stress the importance of openness and honesty with ourselves and one another across racial and cultural differences. We credit Jesus with the words that “if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”, John 8:31–32 (New Revised Standard Version). Might the biased and prejudiced truths about ourselves be part of this?

My sense is yes. Might it be that fully owning who we are and how we have been affected by various political, social, financial, cultural influences and become the biased and prejudiced persons we are/ can be can be part of our way to freedom? My experience is that when I am open and honest about bias and/or prejudice I catch in myself such as when a Black man was to check me in at O’Hare, others will accept it, work with me, and I am free to learn and grow. Another Scripture passage comes to mind; Romans 8:37–39. Taking these verses to heart and soul it is clear that my bias and prejudice, any discriminatory, oppressive and uncaring attitudes, values, projections I may have do not have the power to separate me from God’s love that reaches to the depths of who I am and knows me more fully than I know myself. For me, this is a reassurance that gives me courage to persist in the process of becoming more inclusive of all persons and all people as I believe God’s love and presence includes everybody in every time and every place.

As we inherit and internalize attitudes and values from our immediate environments, I believe we buy into and internalize attitudes and values from our bigger national, financial and political environments also. In order to appreciate more of the power of the issues we are dealing with I think it’s important to understand and approach them in a global international context. Our everyday common language, politically, socially, religiously support and confirm national, cultural and racial differences and preferences. We still have the language that came into use in the last century, if not before, that there are developed and developing countries in the world. The developed countries are generally seen as the most industrialized countries that have higher per capita income levels. Developing countries are generally categorized as countries that are less industrialized and have lower per capita income levels. During the Cold War after WWII, a “three worlds” model of geopolitics came into being. The “First World” was the wealthier nations such as this country and the countries of Western Europe. The “Second World” consisted of the communist Soviet Union and its Eastern European Satellites. The “Third World” was often used as a brief expression for poor or developing nations.

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Might it be that fully owning who we are and how we have been affected by various political, social, financial, cultural influences and become the biased and prejudiced persons we are/can be can be part of our way to freedom?

It's quite a while since I heard the first or the second world being used in referring to the nations that they originally applied to. However, I have heard third world being used fairly often in describing where a person comes from. I had a bright Lutheran student a few years ago who got livid, stood up and spoke to all of us in our Spiritual Care and CPE department when this expression was used about the part of the world that she was from. She was sick and tired of her country and people being referred to by this condescending language and spoke with dignity and assertiveness about the strengths and beauty of her country and her people. She refused to be seen as less than because of where she was from. It became a time of reckoning in our CPE groups. This woman student had impressed residents, interns, certified chaplains and me with her theological and pastoral gifts and strengths. Hearing her anger and hurt in response to how her country was put down and made less than by being referred to as a third world country led to the other CPE students doing some serious reflection in terms of the national and cultural biases they had been continuing and imposing regarding her country. It became a time for critical self-examination for all of us, pastoral staff and students, and a time for taking to heart and mind the truth of what Professor Emmanuel Y. Lartey asserts in his book *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* that as human beings we are like no others, we are like some others and we are like all others (Lartey, 1997).

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She was sick and tired of her country and people being referred to by this condescending language and spoke with dignity and assertiveness about the strengths and beauty of her country and her people.

Our human nature is essentially the same across races, cultures, countries, times, and places, despite us being unique individuals and often being/feeling most alike persons who share our immediate and particular cultural background and roots. We are all emergent social and cultural beings in ever changing relationships and communities where we impact and are impacted by one another, humans and other animals. We may resent and/or resist the thought that we are influenced by others and our environments. Individualism, the thought that we make our own free and independent decisions, can be described as strong, dominant characteristics of this country and culture, especially among Caucasians. The researcher Jonah Berger in his book *Invisible Influence: The Hidden Forces that Shape Behavior*, gives numerous examples of how subtle influences affect the decisions we make (Berger, 2016).

As shared earlier in this article, my main wish and intent is to encourage and stimulate reflection, dialogue, mutual help and support. I think the time has passed when we as Caucasians can hide behind nice polite words to cover up our internalized, relational and systemic racism and culturism as an embarrassing and/or shameful part of our being and story, and that we are called to deeper and fuller authenticity and integrity personally, relationally and politically. I know this is true for me in my work and calling as a pastor and international CPE educator. I think we

all want to be racially and culturally understanding, accepting, respectful and caring and I like these words by C.S. Lewis: “You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.”



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# Growth & Grace & Gratitude: Never Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth

Ron Lehenbauer

## I. Growth

As a child growing up in the middle of the 20th century (1940's & 50's) in the middle of the nation (a suburb of St. Louis, MO), attending a Lutheran school and church where my father was a teacher and organist, living in an all-white neighborhood, I think I was unintentionally taught how to be a bigot. I was taught to automatically dislike people who are different from me. If you were different, there was something wrong with you. I'm not blaming anyone. I don't think this was intentional. It was just in the air, in the hegemony of the culture I was growing up in. The "Catholics" had something wrong with them. There were sections of the city where the "darkies" lived.

I've grown up — by the grace of God. As a child I was also taught the Biblical faith from a Lutheran viewpoint (for example, that all human beings are created in the image of God), and was often led to join in the pledge of allegiance to the flag — to "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Growing up into adulthood, continuing to learn and grow, I've been led to do less fusing and more differentiating in my thinking about others who are different — in other words to be more accepting and even appreciative of differences — different viewpoints, different skin, different backgrounds, etc.

For the past four decades I've lived in and performed most of my pastoral and counseling ministry in one of the most ethnically diverse counties in the world:

the borough of Queens in New York City. This location has been a gift to me in terms of my personal learning and growth. Queens is a densely populated city with about two-million highly mobile inhabitants living in high-rise apartment buildings, 2-6 family dwellings, and individual detached and attached 1-family homes. The U.S. census reported that the population consisted of about 58% white non-Hispanic, 5% black non-Hispanic, 15% Hispanic, and 22% Asian (Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Asian Indian, Filipino).<sup>1</sup>

While originally founded by mostly German immigrants, the Lutheran congregation I served in Queens as pastor for 23 years also reflected more and more

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<sup>1</sup> These are 1990 U.S. census numbers which I used in my doctoral dissertation, *Faith, Culture, and Values: Developing Lay Leaders for Service in Community and Church*, New York Theological Seminary, NYC, 1993. The multi-ethnic mix has increased even more since then.

this same ethnic diversity. At one time I counted more than 15 different nations and ethnic groups represented in the pews. This assembly of diverse persons from all over the world enjoyed worship and prayer and fellowship and study and mutual care-giving and work together despite our wide differences. We were, by the grace of God, making concrete the Biblical Word in Ephesians about “the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

“There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”  
(Ephesians 4:3–6)

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I feel privileged that clients very different from me and with many different backgrounds sit and share and trust me with their very private and personal lives and problems.

The Flushing neighborhood where my wife and I have lived and raised our children contains the same diversity; many of our current immediate neighbors happen to be Chinese. The colleagues my wife (a physical therapist) and I have worked with, and the friendships we’ve developed are from many different backgrounds. Continuing education also played a key role in my growth — a doctoral program centered in racism, classism and sexism at New York Seminary, and a pastoral counseling program at the Post-graduate Center for Mental Health, NYC, which led me to my New York license as a psychotherapist (LMFT). I feel privileged that clients very different from me and with many different backgrounds sit and share and trust me with their very private and personal lives and problems.

Gradually this environment and all of the experiences and opportunities it has provided, I believe, has brought me to a more open and differentiated stance in my perception of others — the differences in others — and the ways I’ve related to them. While I must make confession of the prejudice within me that I still detect now and then, I’m thinking and thankful that consciously and subconsciously the level of that prejudice within me slowly but surely has decreased — by the grace of God.

Upon further reflection, I’m thinking that the history of my personal growth reflects also, in a not insignificant way, the history of the development and growth of liberty and justice for all in our nation. During my growing-up years, the Civil Rights Movement, beginning in the late 1940s, was prompting and pushing America in that growth; it “resulted in laws to protect every American’s constitutional rights, regardless of color, race, sex or national origin.”<sup>2</sup> One of the historical highlights of this movement was the “I Have A Dream” speech of Martin Luther King, Jr., at the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963. Many of us recall a very memorable portion of that speech:

“I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’

2 “Civil Rights Movement Timeline,” *history.com*, editors, updated:Jan 16, 2020, original:Dec 4, 2017.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. 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.”<sup>3</sup>

Similar to my personal experience of growth, all of America’s history displays a steady progress and growth toward that dream coming true — toward liberty and justice for all — from our nation’s founding to where we are today.

From the arrival of the Pilgrims seeking a new land of freedom, to the Revolutionary War for independence, to the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the adoption of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, to the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the expansion west, to the very bloody Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation and the abolition of slavery, to the Industrial Revolution and the arrival of many immigrant workers from Europe and later from around the world, to the movement for women’s suffrage and later the women’s rights movement, to the Great Depression and two world wars, to the Civil Rights Movement, to the Cold War and the defeat of communism, and the war against terror. A continuing forward movement — with some difficult struggles and set-backs — over centuries of progress toward liberty and justice for all. That’s been the history of our nation — by the grace of God.

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## II. Grace

When I say, “by God’s grace,” I’m not just blowing smoke. I deeply believe that it is God’s mercy and grace that has loved and guided me through my life and personal growth. And I deeply believe that it is God’s mercy and grace that has guided and blessed America’s progress throughout its history.

Many Bible scholars believe that the one word that conveys the central theme of Holy Scripture as a whole is the word “grace.” That’s what I’ve taught and preached. Grace is at the center of God’s actions in the Biblical history of salvation. All of the “heros” in the Biblical story were human sinners with a life-history of weaknesses, mistakes and sins — the patriarchs, ancestors of Jesus, prophets, and apostles. Noah drank too much and behaved inappropriately (Genesis 9:20–25). Abraham pimped his wife Sarah to the Egyptian pharaoh for personal gain (Genesis 12:10–20). Isaac is the only patriarch in Genesis portrayed as monogamous and without concubines; but

<sup>3</sup> “‘I Have a Dream,’ Address Delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” Stanford (internet): The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute.

he frequently appears passive and naive, unaware of the intention of others.<sup>4</sup> Jacob, conspiring with his mother, deceived his father to fraudulently obtain his father's blessing and steal his brother's birth-right (Genesis 27:1–41). King David committed adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11:1–12:14). All the disciples of Jesus abandoned him in his hour of deepest need (Mark 14:50). Peter disowned being a follower of Jesus (Mark 14:66–72). Paul was a persecutor of Christians and participated in the stoning of Deacon Stephen (Acts 7:54–8:3). I'm just citing a few examples.

We could continue on with many more — examples of Bible characters who were not by any stretch of the imagination perfect human beings. Another list appears in Hebrews where many imperfect Biblical heroes “through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised....” (Hebrews 11:33) A central theme in the life stories of all these flawed heroes was God's grace in their life and their trust in God. It was God's grace that forgave their flaws and sins, declared them “righteous” persons in the sight of God, and gave them faith and the ability to achieve great things.

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It was God's grace that forgave their flaws and sins, declared them “righteous” persons in the sight of God, and gave them faith and the ability to achieve great things.

Freedom, justice and peace — the salvation of humanity — has always been God's merciful desire and goal for all God's human children — that through divine grace, in the good news of the love and ministry of Jesus, all persons might “be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4) My point is that God has continued throughout history and even now to use flawed sinners (like me, by God's grace) to help carry out that mission.

What we've just noted about all of the heroes of Biblical history can also be said, I believe, about most of the “heroes” of America's founding and history. Lately their flaws and sins have especially been emphasized. America's history describes a remarkable and fairly steady progress and growth toward liberty and justice for all, with founders and leaders who were flawed and sinning human beings. Yes, they were that, but nevertheless God, in grace, blessed and empowered them to accomplish amazing things.

Christopher Columbus, an Italian explorer and navigator, completed four voyages across the Atlantic Ocean, opening the way for European exploration and settlement of the Americas, helping create the modern world. On the other hand, scholars are giving greater attention to the crimes committed under Columbus' governance, emphasizing the disastrous impact of the slave trade and the ravages of imported disease on the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean region and the American continents.<sup>5</sup> George Washington, whom we call the “father of our country,” and Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, were slave

4 Harpers Bible Dictionary

5 Cf. Wikipedia and Britannica.com.

holders. Thomas Jefferson had an affair and a child with one of his slaves. Some have perhaps correctly stated that slavery is America's original sin. Abraham Lincoln, whom many regard as America's greatest president, who successfully prosecuted the civil war and ended the institution of slavery in the United States, was accused of various kinds of abuses of executive authority as president. Stephen Carter, a Lincoln biographer, points to some other of Lincoln's flaws.

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We could continue to point to the flaws and sins of America's leaders throughout history.

“My admiration for Lincoln is undiminished, in part because I don't try to judge him by the standards of the 21st century. He was not above telling the occasional racial joke, and he made it very clear more than once, leading up to the Civil War, that he thought black people were, as a group, inferior to white people. What's striking about Lincoln isn't so much that he was originally trapped in the racial attitudes of his day but, rather, that he was able to do so much to transcend those attitudes as time went on. He went on quite an intellectual and, I suppose one could say, moral journey over those years in the White House, and evolved enormously. But the key thing is what he did, not why he did it.”<sup>6</sup>

We could continue to point to the flaws and sins of America's leaders throughout history. Ulysses S. Grant, who led the Union Army to victory during the Civil War, struggled with alcoholism all his life. FDR and JFK had extra-marital affairs. But I think that's enough to make the point.

It is not in the purview of this paper to evaluate the validity of negative or positive descriptions of the many men and women who played key roles and accomplished deeds of note in the history of our nation. We do emphasize, however, that, yes, each of them were flawed sinful human beings. Nevertheless, by God's grace, their deeds of note — often courageous — played a momentous role in our history. And our nation has been blessed to be one of the greatest places of freedom and justice and progress in the history of the world.

### III. Gratitude

There's something worrying me though. We might be looking a gift horse in the mouth. That old saying came to me while writing this paper. I wondered what it meant. So I looked it up. We can trace this old “common proverb” as far back as St. Jerome.<sup>7</sup> As I explored Google on the internet, what I learned is that horses grow more teeth as they age, and their existing teeth begin to change shape and project further forward; so inspecting their teeth is a way of gauging age. A young horse is a more desirable gift than an old one. So the proverb is an admonishment to be grateful

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6 Washingtonpost.com, “Discovering and accepting Lincoln's flaws,” by Kevin Nance (7/7/2012), a review of Stephen L. Carter, *The Impeachment of Abraham Lincoln*.

7 “Noli equi dentes inspicere donati,” from the Preface to the Commentaries of the Letter to the Ephesians, circa AD 400.

when receiving a present — if someone’s giving you a horse as a gift — and not to find fault with that present. To question the value of a gift is an insult. Don’t question the value of a gift. Don’t be ungrateful when you receive a gift.

We Americans have received a very precious gift — a gift that is very old and at the same time very new. I’ve been describing it in this paper — the progress and growth in America (in our people), by the grace of God, out of slavery, racism, bigotry and prejudice of all kinds toward liberty and justice for all. What I’m worried about is that we are losing our gratitude for that gift — or maybe taking it for granted — or maybe not even perceiving it as a gift. In a nation that has continually fought for and won freedom and justice, these must be constantly defended by each new generation; or freedom and justice for all can easily be lost — or deteriorate.

It’s not that we have arrived at a perfect non-racist society and culture. We obviously haven’t. There’ll always be problems to solve, barriers and prejudices to be overcome, differences to resolve, sins to repent of that need forgiveness. But let’s not forget or overlook our growth and progress over time toward liberty and justice for all. My hope is that all Americans will see that as a blessing from God’s grace and be grateful. And my hope is that we’ll keep doing what we need to do within our own minds and hearts, in all our relationships and encounters, and in our systems and structures and institutions, to keep the growth going — toward liberty and justice for all. Never look a gift horse in the mouth.

Some wise teachings of Jesus come to mind. By God’s grace we all might take them to heart:

“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone.” (John 8:7)

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:1–5)

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.” (Matthew 13:31–32)



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is a parish pastor and pastoral  
counselor in Flushing, NY.*

# The Most Lutheran Thing I've Ever Done

**Joshua Salzberg**

**I'M A LIFELONG LUTHERAN.** I was Baptized and Confirmed in Lutheran Churches. I attended Lutheran Schools. I married a Lutheran Teacher whose family is from Frankenmuth, Michigan.

But on Juneteenth, 2020, I did the most Lutheran thing possible:

I created an acronym.

Co-founded with Rev. Matthew Ryan González, Lutherans for Racial Justice (LRJ) is a grassroots coalition that seeks to bring about racial reconciliation and reform within the congregations and communities of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). This movement is not on a crusade to bear false testimony against current leadership or dwell on past grievances. In fact, the goal is quite the opposite: we love our church body and are endeavoring to find ways to better-understand and better-serve all nations by creating a safe space to ask questions, express ideas, and share concerns about the many complex issues surrounding race. Over the past two months, the LRJ team has created and curated free educational resources, started a network for congregational connections and support, and lovingly encouraged Lutheran Schools to form policies around racial diversity and representation. We're also in the early stages of developing a diversity training and mentorship program, custom-built for LCMS institutions.

When our churches are facing a global pandemic why should we introduce one more challenge for us to worry about?

This summer, the public health crisis shined a spotlight on needs that have been lingering in the shadows of our society for decades. We caught a glimpse of the challenges single-parents face to raise a child and earn a living wage. We saw the toll that isolation and anxiety can take on mental health. And we watched a man suffocate over the course of eight minutes and forty-two seconds, as a crowd of bystanders cried out in protest. While George Floyd's murder was shocking, the racial disparities in America across many demographics are no secret. We know that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Americans are disproportionately arrested and charged. We know that a Black mother with a college degree is up to five times more likely to die in childbirth. We know that a Black child is three times more likely to drown than a white child. Our society's racial

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inequalities were not invented in the past few months, but the harsh summer sun has made the truth difficult to ignore: there are systems in place which favor the sanctity of some Americans' lives over the sanctity of others based on nothing more than the color of their skin.

This is not radical neo-Marxist thought. This is not Critical Race Theory. This is reality — a reality that the LCMS presently acknowledges.

So...how does this relate to the church's call to go into the world and preach the gospel to all creation? (Mark 16:15–19) In light of the fulfillment of the Covenants through Jesus, God calls us, as broken as we are, to bear witness to the covenant and by his love be love to all.

Or as Martin Luther put it: “God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.”

To draw from Luther's wisdom, racial justice is not about the justice before God that can only be found in the cross. Nor is it an excuse for retribution or a witch hunt. No, the Biblical concept of justice is more radical than vengeance. As Jesus washed his disciples' feet, we are called to make ourselves nothing and wash one another's feet. And over the course of my life, countless Lutheran teachers, pastors, synodical leaders, and members have washed my feet, sacrificing their time and resources to love me without pretense, caring for me as though they were caring for Christ Himself (Matthew 25:35–36). Based on my experience, Lutherans are well-equipped to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. Let us go then and make disciples of all nations.

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In light of the fulfillment of the Covenants through Jesus, God calls us, as broken as we are, to bear witness to the covenant and by his love be love to all.

## How do we engage issues surrounding race?

### 1. Listen & Learn

Feeling overwhelmed? That's okay!

Take time to learn, ask questions, pray, meditate, and converse about the complex issues surrounding racial justice and equity. The LRJ resources page ([lutheransforracialjustice.com/resources](http://lutheransforracialjustice.com/resources)) has book recommendations, discussion guides, and videos that can help you get started. Kindly ask your home congregation to engage in these conversations as well. This may feel uncomfortable. We may have disagreements. That's okay too. As difficult as it may be, remember to approach these conversations with a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1–10).

### 2. Start With Your Vocations

Lutherans are more equipped than most to meet the opportunity of this moment, for we have the concept of vocation built into our tradition:

“The prince should think: Christ has served me and made everything to follow him; therefore, I should also serve my neighbor, protect him and everything

that belongs to him. That is why God has given me this office, and I have it that I might serve him. That would be a good prince and ruler. When a prince sees his neighbor oppressed, he should think: That concerns me! I must protect and shield my neighbor. ... The same is true for the shoemaker, tailor, scribe, or reader. If he is a Christian tailor, he will say: I make these clothes because God has bidden me do so, so that I can earn a living, so that I can help and serve my neighbor.” —Martin Luther, Sermon at the Castle Church in Weimar

As both Scripture and Luther explain, we each have different vocational callings (some prophets, some teachers, some shoemakers, some tailors), which are all equally noble and holy. Please don't feel pulled away from your calling by that of LRJ! The needs of this world are certainly big enough for us all.

That said, a narrow cultural lens can sometimes create unintentional stumbling blocks as we proclaim the gospel. Challenge yourself to better-understand your neighbors' culture, whether it's in your vocation at church, work, or as a citizen (1 Corinthians 9:19–23).

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I was not willing to lay down my life for George Floyd or Breonna Taylor. Most days, I'm not willing to lay down my coffee for a friend, let alone lay down my iPhone or my job or my life ambitions.

### 3. As You Take Action, Pray for Guidance (and Lots of Grace!)

Not sure where to start? Contact LRJ at [lutheransforracialjustice.com/contact](http://lutheransforracialjustice.com/contact) and tell us a little about your vocations. The needs of this world, whichever ones God calls you to meet, will most certainly require sacrifice.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” —John 15:13

I was not willing to lay down my life for George Floyd or Breonna Taylor. Most days, I'm not willing to lay down my coffee for a friend, let alone lay down my iPhone or my job or my life ambitions. No, most days when faced with the needs of my neighbor, I'm less likely to respond with Godly compassion and more likely to respond with the words of Cain: “Am I my brother's keeper?”

Thank God that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of which I am the worst. With Luther, we pray that “the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

Lutherans for Racial Justice does not expect the deep wounds of racial divide to be healed overnight. We do believe, however, that this moment offers both church workers and laity the opportunity to take part in the great Lutheran tradition of

Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Rosa Young, as we, by God's grace, pursue our holy vocations, not to better ourselves or our place before God, but to wash our neighbors' feet.

And I can't think of anything more Lutheran than that (except for a good acronym, of course).



*Joshua Salzberg is Co-Founder  
of Lutherans for Racial Justice.*

## The African Descent Lutheran Association

**Tiffany C. Chaney**

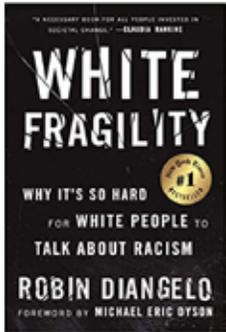
**THE AFRICAN DESCENT LUTHERAN ASSOCIATION** (“ADLA”), one of six ethnic associations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, represents over 49,000 Lutherans of African Descent. ADLA, through its chapters and biennial assemblies, develops important linkages, advocates support for congregations, promotes implementation of the ELCA African Descent Strategy, and provides fellowship, learning, and sharing opportunities. ADLA also provides a forum for theological reflections for clergy and lay members through collaboration with the Black Lutheran Ministerium and the Conference of International Black Lutherans.

ADLA’s current objectives are:

1. Connecting across the African Diaspora,
2. Strengthening Leadership and Congregations,
3. Focusing on Health and Wellness,
4. Developing Ecumenical Relationships,
5. Seeking Justice Addressing Homelessness and Immigration, and
6. Engaging Youth through Development and Advocacy.

Visit ADLA’s website, [adlaelca.org](http://adlaelca.org), to learn more about our ELCA African descent community and how to join this active, vital network and association.

*Tiffany C. Chaney is the National Communications Chairperson of the African Descent Lutheran Association*



## *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*

DiAngelo, Robin, Boston: Beacon Press, 2018. ISBN 080707414

Reviewed by John Schumacher

**FOR MANY YEARS I, AS THE MANAGER** of a hospice spiritual care staff, had the privilege of providing mentorship and clinical supervision for one resident annually from the local hospital CPE site. Of the dozen students I supervised, one was a Black woman.

Once during her residency I had a family ask that their patient not be assigned a Black chaplain — even before they were certain there was a Black chaplain on staff or knew that I had already assigned the resident to serve their mother. It saddened me to encounter what I assessed as vestigial racism but, without going into the details of the case here, I concluded it would not be helpful to either the patient or the resident to leave the assignment unchanged.

I made the reassignment to another chaplain in the most ignorant and insensitive manner possible. I sent the resident a voicemail as I was heading out the door for a two week vacation. I didn't consider the impact of the message on her. I did not explain my thinking as I decided to honor the family request. I did not grant her the opportunity to process with me her experience of my voicemail and the message it conveyed.

The resident was waiting for me when I returned from vacation. She did not confront me and accuse me of being a racist. Rather in conversation with me about my behavior she observed that “my supervisor is a racist.” Even this suggestion triggered a defensive response. I could not accept the label “racist.” The Klan and neo-Nazis are racists. I actively recruited this Black woman to do residency with the hospice. I had been commended by the hospice CEO as being a leader in creating the most racially and ethnically diverse department in the agency. How could I be a racist? And in my defensiveness I was deaf to what the resident could have taught me.

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I could not accept the label “racist.” The Klan and neo-Nazis are racists.

Last month, more than fifteen years after this encounter with the Black resident I read *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo and recognized with absolute clarity that my response was a textbook demonstration of white fragility. DiAngelo characterizes white fragility as a process through which white people, socialized into an unrecognized or unacknowledged sense of superiority, respond defensively to perceived challenges to white racial worldviews and our self-identities as good moral

people. These defensive responses, though triggered by anxiety and discomfort, are born of entitlement and are a powerful tool for maintaining white racial control. My conversation with the resident challenged me on a number of unrecognized assumptions which DiAngelo identifies as foundational to white fragility, including:

- Racism is personal prejudice.
- I am free of racism.
- Racism can only be intentional.
- I am a good person. I can't be racist.
- Racism is conscious bias. I have none.

Because I experienced incongruity between my self-understanding and the person the resident perceived me to be I felt confused, defensive, embarrassed, and hurt, a response which is consistent with other foundational assumptions:

- I am entitled to remain comfortable.
- The important issue is how I am perceived.
- I am feeling challenged, therefore you are wrong.
- It is unkind to point out racism.

It is worth noting for our community of chaplains, clinical educators, and clinical educators, as well as for the wider community of pastoral care providers that DiAngelo's intended primary audience is "white progressives." It is her contention that white progressives "cause the most daily damage to people of color." White progressives are those white people who believe they are not racist or not intentionally racist. We are certain we "get it" and we put our energy into making sure other people see that we have arrived rather than into the life-long work we need to do in self-critique, continuing education, relationship building, and antiracist action. We white progressives perpetuate racism while being well defended against any suggestion that we participate in and benefit from the system.

For me and for my white peers in pastoral care, I hear three challenges from DiAngelo's work — personal, professional, and *theological*.

The *personal challenge* is to see myself clearly. I am a white person socialized in a racism-based society. I have a racist world view, biases, patterns of behavior, and investments in a system which elevates me. Every day I benefit from white privilege in ways I haven't begun to comprehend. I am called to a life-long process of challenging my own socialization and investment in racism. I need to tolerate the discomfort of an honest appraisal of my internalized sense of superiority and privilege.

When considering how to begin, I turn to a question asked by DiAngelo, "What has enabled you to be a full, educated, professional adult and not know about racism?" If I need to be educated there are books, movies, documentaries, museums,

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DiAngelo's intended primary audience is "white progressives." It is her contention that white progressives "cause the most daily damage to people of color."

and a whole host of other resources to be explored. If I need to expand my circle beyond people who look like me, I can commit to intentionally building relationships. If I need to get out of my comfort zone, I can find those people and organizations who are seeking dialogue and action for racial justice.

The *professional challenge* is to understand how white privilege and white fragility unconsciously shape my pastoral identity and practice. Most relevant here are four standards from the Common Qualifications and Competencies for Professional Chaplaincy:

- PIC1: Be self-reflective, including identifying one's professional strengths and limitations in the provision of care.
- PIC2: Articulate ways in which one's feelings, attitudes, and assumptions affect professional practice.
- PIC4: Function in a manner that respects the physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual boundaries of others.
- PPS3: Provide spiritual care that respects diversity and differences including, but not limited to culture, gender, sexual orientation and spiritual/religious practices.

It is interesting to note — and could merit a separate conversation — the absence of references to race in the common standards. This absence might reflect DiAngelo's characterization of the averse racism of well-intentioned white progressives — “I don't see race” — which denies the reality of unconscious bias. In any case, these standards merit re-examination in light of white fragility as we do clinical pastoral education, prepare for and conduct certification committees, and do reflection on our pastoral practice with our peers.

Since Jim Wallis named racism as “America's original sin,” it follows that all Christian, and certainly we Lutheran, pastoral educators and practitioners are called to the *theological challenge* of wrestling with racial injustice and white fragility within the context of that which we believe and confess. I hear DiAngelo as almost Pauline as she convicts me of my sin, my own complicity in unacknowledged racism. Various texts from Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians came to mind as I read and reflected upon DiAngelo.

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” Romans 7:15–19

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These standards merit re-examination in light of white fragility as we do clinical pastoral education, prepare for and conduct certification committees, and do reflection on our pastoral practice with our peers.

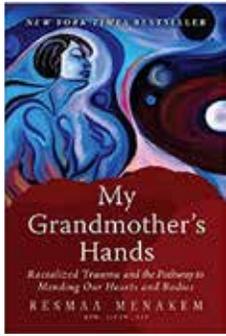
One question for consideration is how does the promised freedom in Christ expounded by Paul in Galatians free and empower me to understand, acknowledge, and challenge racism, a systematic, institutionalized, and omnipresent phenomenon, which like sin itself, pervades every vestige of reality?

I leave consideration of this question to the guidance of a more astute student of Paul.

I would not have picked up *White Fragility* on my own initiative but confused and distressed by the murders of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, and the many other current reflections of racial sickness within our country, I was eager to read — to do something — when the board of a pastoral care agency on which I serve chose to read and discuss *White Fragility* as the focus of its annual (this year, virtual) retreat. The board/staff is currently about two-thirds white and one-third persons of color. The facilitated discussion was slow with times of silence. Talking about race in an inter-racial group is awkward for white folks. However, I deeply appreciate being challenged to read the book and to be a part of the process which will continue beyond the board retreat. I have gained insight into myself and how I function in a racially-defined society. I see the need to grow. I also appreciate working with this board. While the self-reflective conversation will of necessity continue, the board discussion will also include consideration of the steps we can take as an agency to address racial injustice in our ministry context. Going forward we will not be the people we were or the board we have been because of the impact of DiAngelo's work.



*John E. Schumacher, MDiv, BCC is happily retired, having served two parish calls and a call to Rainbow Hospice and Palliative Care, all in metropolitan Chicago. In retirement he serves on the CPE Professional Advisory Group for Advocate Lutheran General Hospital and the Board of Directors for Bishop Anderson House at Rush University Medical Center.*



## *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*

Menakem, Resmaa, Las Vegas, Nevada, Central Recovery Press, 2017.

Reviewed by Nancy Wigdahl

**YEARS AGO AS A YOUNG ADULT**, I was a patient in a university teaching hospital when a troop of medical residents and their attending physician leader came into my room for a surgical follow-up. The attending physician asked if I was ready to have my nasogastric tube removed. Upon my immediate agreement, he nodded to one of his eager disciples, who promptly approached me. I recoiled and he abruptly stopped, before slowly doing the procedure. He was African American. I thought of that story when I began to read this book. Obviously the power of that reaction has remained with me, for I remember that the shocking spontaneity of my strong reaction came from my body and not from my rational mind.

Reesmaa Menakem is a healer and trauma therapist, not a theologian or philosopher. This book is a timely presentation regarding the psychobiology of racialized trauma in our culture. Trauma is defined as a spontaneous protective mechanism used by the body to stop or thwart further or future potential damage (30). Trauma can be the body's response to a long sequence of smaller wounds, or a response to anything that it experiences as too much, too soon, too fast, and, trauma is unpredictable (36). Unhealed racialized trauma has a ripple effect, through families, generations, and centuries. We all have unhealed racialized trauma in our bodies and we all have need for healing.

Menakem's focus is mending psyches, souls, bodies, and relationships as embodied in families, neighborhoods, and communities. He speaks of clean pain that mends and builds capacity for growth, and, dirty pain that avoids, blames, and denies. Trauma is about speed and reflexivity, thus the path to healing involves the intentional practice of slowing down and paying attention to our bodies' experiences, sensations and uncertainties with the goal of metabolizing clean pain.

White Americans must lead this transformation of healing from racialized trauma, but not through new laws, policies, procedures, standards and strategies. Rather, genuine transformation involves white Americans willingly taking responsibility for themselves, willingly acknowledging their racialized trauma, and

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willingly moving through clean pain relative to their racialized trauma. African Americans and American police need to do the same.

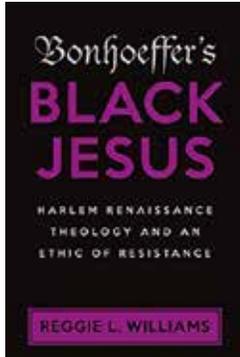
This book is a worthy read and very timely given the waves of racialized trauma that has confronted us over the past months of 2020. The book contains numerous body-centered practices that support heightened body awareness and healing, and, numerous suggestions for transformation. However, the book is not a fast read and is worthy of the time consuming self-focus of the exercises to develop body awareness.

Will the book make one a better chaplain, pastor or counselor? The book does provide the opportunity to begin to heal from not only racialized trauma but also the secondary traumas of ministry with people who are dealing with the trauma of life transitions of any origin.

We are all a people who carry trauma whether from our history, our ministry, and even our recent abrupt encounter with a pandemic that continues to challenge us.



*Nancy Wigdahl is a retired ELCA pastor and ACPE Educator who lives in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. She continues to be active with ACPE as a contract Educator and a volunteer with both Certification and Accreditation*



## *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and An Ethic of Resistance.*

Williams, Reggie L. ,Waco, Texas: Baylor Press, 2014.

**Reviewed by Nick Shults**

**MANY READERS MAY BE FAMILIAR** with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, his works, and his death at the hands of the Nazis. What the reader may not know is how Bonhoeffer developed into the influential theologian he became in the 20th century. It is often seen as a footnote to his brilliant career that Bonhoeffer spent a year studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York in the early 1930's. However, in *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus* Reggie L. Williams, Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL, aptly demonstrates the influence this year of study at Union Theological Seminary in New York had on Bonhoeffer's life, faith, and future.

Further, Williams helps the reader to see that it was not his time in the classroom which would shape the trajectory of Bonhoeffer's career. Rather, Williams shows Bonhoeffer's future ministry and eventual murder at the hands of the Third Reich was primarily shaped by his life with and education from Harlem's African American community and culture during the Harlem Renaissance and Great Depression. The confluence of major voices of the Harlem Renaissance, the ecclesiology and social ministry of Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Sr. and Abyssinian Baptist Church, and the music of the Negro Spiritual came together to paint a picture of the Black Jesus — Jesus who is with and for those who are suffering, oppressed, and marginalized. This tradition of the Black Jesus is what Bonhoeffer took back with him to Germany and the tradition from which he spoke out against the rise of National Socialism.

Williams convincingly tracks Bonhoeffer's theological development from his time as a graduate student and pastor in Europe whose theology was deeply influenced by post-World War I German nationalism, to his year in Harlem, and finally to his work as a pastor and theologian back in Germany as the National Socialist Party grew in influence and began their reign of terror. With a newly formed image of Jesus and a theology deeply rooted in Christ's presence with the suffering, Bonhoeffer was prepared for a life of ministry with and for the marginalized in Germany.

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The author surveys the key leaders of the Harlem Renaissance and the voices which would have a deep impact on Bonhoeffer and his developing theology. At the time of Bonhoeffer's studies in New York, many in Harlem were speaking out against racism, oppression, and the white notion of black inferiority. Williams reviews the work of major influences such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Claude McKay, Georgia Douglass Johnson, and Langston Hughes. What these voices have in common is a portrayal of a Jesus who is not created in the image of white, European colonialists but rather a Jesus, a Black Jesus, who is with and for the abused, hated, lynched, marginalized, and oppressed, a Black Jesus that is present with the outcast in their suffering.

Not only was Bonhoeffer influenced by the prominent voices of the Harlem Renaissance movement, Williams shows how Bonhoeffer was also profoundly impacted by the local African American church. Specifically, Williams shows how Bonhoeffer was influenced by Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Sr. of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. The congregation itself, rooted in the Lordship of Christ, "was an active church, socially, politically, and spiritually, (95)".

Upon his return to Germany, Bonhoeffer immediately put into practice that which he was taught and observed in Harlem. Following Christ who is present with the suffering and oppressed meant being present with and for others as well. Williams shows the crucial nature of the Christian's empathic presence with and for the poor and marginalized as he traces Bonhoeffer's pastoral practice in Germany. Bonhoeffer sought out opportunities to pastor and teach in the slums of Berlin and as the threat of the Nazis continued to rise, Bonhoeffer's voice continued to rise as well.

Even among the Confessing Church movement — a movement opposed to the move to make the Führer the head of Germany's state church — Bonhoeffer's voice echoed the radical notion of the Church's responsibility for the oppressed. None more than Bonhoeffer opposed the Nazi's treatment of the Jews and other outcast people groups. This, Williams shows throughout the book, was due to Bonhoeffer's hands-on education in New York during the Harlem Renaissance. The Jesus at work in New York is the Jesus who led Bonhoeffer to speak up for those suffering at the hands of the Nazis.

*Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus* offers the reader insight into the life of one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century and sheds new light on Bonhoeffer's pastoral and theological development. Williams also manages to let this influential theologian speak to a 21st century audience when we most need to hear the voices of the Harlem Renaissance and see Bonhoeffer's application of their collective voice and theology.

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Bonhoeffer came to see that the church has a profound role to play in social issues such as racism and justice. In fact, for Bonhoeffer, these were theological issues and the church was called on to respond both practically and theologically. As Williams writes, “For Bonhoeffer, Christians must see society from the perspective of marginalized people since faithful Christianity is calibrated from the perspective of suffering rather than from dominance” (140). Indeed, the Christ who suffered *for* us is the Christ who suffers *with* us. In Harlem, Bonhoeffer learned to follow Jesus into the suffering of others.

Williams offers an exceptional and challenging work that not only sheds light on the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer but also issues a challenge for the church in America today and for those working in Specialized Pastoral Ministry. In August I completed my first unit of CPE working with incarcerated men at the Elmwood Correctional

Facility in Santa Clara County (CA). *Bonhoeffer’s Black Jesus* spoke to my experience and what I learned in the presence of those in jail. I first began ministry in the Elmwood Correctional Facility as a volunteer meeting one to one with men in minimum and medium security units. As I entered into ministry in this setting, I was under the impression I was going to be bringing something to those I would encounter. However, I quickly experienced a different truth: to be in the presence of the incarcerated, to my surprise, was to be in the presence of Christ himself.

This Christ was not the pie-in-the-sky, wait until you die and go to heaven Christ I was raised with. This Christ was the Christ of the marginalized, the Christ of the suffering, the Christ who sits in solidarity with those whom society has tossed away and forgotten, those unjustly punished, and those who remain in jail simply because they are too poor to afford bail. In short, this Christ was the Christ who remembers those society refuses to acknowledge.

What I learned through my CPE experience was that Jesus had beat me to the jail. His Word was everywhere. And more than that, many of the inmates I met with were longing for more. They were longing to know that they had not been abandoned by Jesus even in this, their darkest hour. For my part, I was invited to be the physical, tangible presence and representation of this Jesus who stands in solidarity with the incarcerated.

*Bonhoeffer’s Black Jesus* continues to challenge me in my role as a pastor of a local congregation. As a chaplain and CPE student I had the opportunity to be present with inmates in their suffering. As a pastor, I have been challenged to find my prophetic voice and speak to what I have seen and heard in jail, to speak out the news that in jail I have witnessed the presence of Jesus. That Jesus has not abandoned those whom society has. More than that, I am challenged to speak *for*

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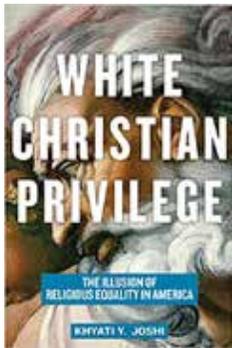
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those who continue to sit, day after day, in jail — reminding myself, my congregation, and my community that there is an ever-growing population of people that has been despised, forgotten and rejected. I am challenged to speak on their behalf, calling all who will listen to their side.

As we all continue to find our way and our voices in such chaotic and divided times, Williams gives us a clear picture of what such a pastoral and prophetic voice looks like. In Bonhoeffer we see one who immersed himself in the lives of others, especially in the lives of those pressed to the margins of society. And in Bonhoeffer, Williams shows us an uncompromising voice willing to stand firm against the voices of hate, racism, violence, and oppression. For Bonhoeffer, this was what it meant to follow Jesus not away from but into the suffering of this life.



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## White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America

by Khyati Y, Joshi. New York University Press, 2020. ISBN cloth: 9781479840236; ISBN ebook: 9781479835119

Reviewed by **Bruce Hartung**

**I WAS READING** *White Christian Privilege* at the same time as I was doing a bit of research on “implicit bias” for an on-line conversation I was facilitating on that subject. Implicit bias sometimes is identified also as unconscious bias and is seen as biases about social groups that arise implicitly and without conscious reasoning and/or thoughtful discernment. They are immediate and intuitive and generally quite physiological as well. I can (and do) affirm that I am generally unbiased, but if I have a physiological response to one racial group approaching me as different from a different racial group approaching me I could very well need to own my own implicit bias. In and of itself, I find this challenging. In other words, what I think I am may not actually be so in this case. Clearly I have a lot to learn about my own implicit bias.

Khyati Joshi briefly takes up this theme in her book. “Implicit bias generally results in a preference for dominant group members and creates privilege for people in those groups. It informs our perception of a person or social group, and can influence our decision-making and behavior. Formed by our socialization, our experiences, and our exposure to others’ views, implicit bias leads to quick and inaccurate judgment based on limited facts and our own life experience. This perception gives certain individuals and groups both unearned advantage and unearned disadvantage in the workplace.

*People can consciously believe in equality while simultaneously acting on subconscious prejudices.”* (pp. 167–168, italics mine) Hmm!

Then I took the Harvard Implicit Association Test [implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.htm](http://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.htm) that focused on race. While this test and the concept itself are controversial, I scored moderately preferential for white folks, forcing me further into examining my own racial attitudes. In short, I was challenged. And I was still reading and finishing Joshi.

The way to deal with things unconscious (or, in Johari Window terms things “not known to self and not known to others” or even things “known to others but not

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known to self”) is to, in the latter case, be open to feedback, and in the former case to place oneself in positions of openness to learning and new experience. Enter again my continuing experience with Joshi.

Here is Joshi’s main point (I believe): “(t)he Christian norm often functions in tandem with the racial normativity of Whiteness to generate structures and ideas of White Christian supremacy, such as that Whiteness and Christianity are read as American, while everything else appears foreign. Norms do not usually ‘hit you over the head.’ Their effects are subtle, influencing unexpressed distinctions between usual and unusual, local and foreign, ‘us’ and ‘them’. ... Christian privilege runs so deep that a Christian does not have to do anything to benefit from its advantages. *Christian privilege is possessed by Christians whether or not they are aware of it. No conscious thought or effort is required.*” (p. 22, italics mine)

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“Norms do not usually ‘hit you over the head.’ Their effects are subtle, influencing unexpressed distinctions between usual and unusual, local and foreign, ‘us’ and ‘them.’”

One of her conclusions: “For almost 250 years, the United States has answered that question (*of national identity*) by maintaining a system that on its face seems to discriminate based on race, while in fact defining the very notion of race, and of eligibility for admission and membership, in terms of religion. (p. 123)

Her healthy path forward: “Envisioning a more perfect union requires us to change the entire framework. It is not about some people giving up privilege, or others seizing it. Rather, it is about working together in meaningful ways, each from our own position, to fulfill our nation’s founding promises.” (p. 225)

So here I am, a follower of Jesus and a citizen of the United States, more aware of systemic biases both racial and religious in our land and in myself. Anyone want to read the book and discuss it further? Be in touch and we could perhaps form a little book club to do it. The book is rich in specific examples.

One of those examples is when she takes up the nature of the persecution of Christians in the United States. When persons of other faith and religious groups look to have the same privilege as the white Christian, the white Christians who are accustomed to privilege often (or at least sometimes) claim persecution. Actually, all that is happening is that folks want the same privilege or rights. The claim of persecution is, thus, quite bogus. It is proposed insights such as this one that likely will challenge the reader. But Joshi certainly has a point.

I know that I will be looking for these biases in myself and in the systems I experience. But I also know that I will need experiences and others to aid in this process. Joshi’s views are controversial to be sure. There is much to be questioned in her historical narrative. So I urge us all not simply to swallow everything. Still, I encourage our readers to let Joshi’s experiences in her book and others that are recounted in this issue of *Caring Connections* as well as other sought-out

opportunities to learn and grow in this area impact you as you open yourself to the thoughts, emotions and lives of others. I pray that I, with the help of others, can maintain this openness as well.

Next on my reading list, by the way – *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* by Robert Jones and *Caste: The Origin of our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson.



*Bruce Hartung is a co-editor of Caring Connections and is a retired pastoral counselor (AAPC) and psychologist.*