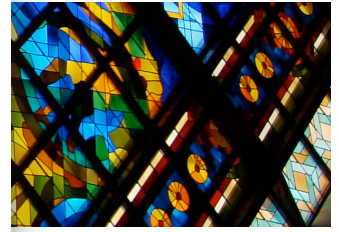




40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 36

Reflections on Anti-Racism



Learning

Barry Rieder

Systemic racism and White privilege isn't always obvious to some among us. Unfortunately for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour it is only too real. Sometimes it is painful and other times it is just numbing.

Recently a Black spoken-word artist from the United States was a guest speaker at Windermere United Church in Toronto. He had a poem about shampoo. He pointed out that on most brands of shampoo, they write "For Normal Hair." As he pointed out, just because he has wavy black hair, does that mean his hair is considered "abnormal"?

The former chair of my board pointed out that when automatic soap dispensers first came into use, the sensors were not able to recognise black hands underneath them. The irony of this was the person who invented the dispenser was a Black man, but when it went into production they didn't use sensors that recognized different pigments of skin.

Just ask a Black person if they have ever been followed by security in a store or been pulled over for "random" stops while driving. These are things that White people like myself never experience. I am in an interracial relationship, and it's extremely difficult to find anniversary or Valentine's Day cards that have suitable images that match my wife's complexion. I know that since George Floyd's death and rising support for Black Lives Matter, commercials on TV have become a lot more diverse, but there is so much more to be done.

Look at the people who represent you in various levels of government, or the people who are in positions of power in various companies and businesses. Is this reflective of the diversity of God's beautiful creation? Remember we were made in the image of God. And if that is so, we can no longer hold onto the image of a White God or White saviour since the overwhelming majority of the

world's population are people of colour.

I remember Kofi Hope doing an anti-racism workshop for our presbytery before becoming a Rhodes Scholar. He pointed out that in most restaurants the servers are White, but if you open the door to the kitchen you will see a different picture.

I have been blessed to work in the Jane and Finch area, in northwest Toronto, for the last 26 years as a community minister on behalf of the United Church. This community in Toronto is blessed with riches of cultural diversity, representing over 110 nationalities and 70 different languages and dialects. However, it does have its problems, which are rooted in racialized poverty. Unfortunately for the last several years it has had the highest amount of gun incidents of any neighbourhood in Toronto. In the "Year of the Gun" in Toronto, when over 50 young Black men lost their lives to violence, an article in the *Globe & Mail* newspaper



Source: Bernard Clark / Queen's University, Flickr (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

A colourful mural in Toronto's Jane Finch community remembers young people who lost their lives to gun violence.

stated that they were “not surprised” by this outbreak of violence; they cited that youth unemployment was about 17% but for Black male youth it was double that amount. For every three Black male youth in Toronto, one could not get a job. Not because of not trying, or because of lack of education, but because of the colour of their skin. These conditions, continued over generations, breed desperation and hopelessness amongst Black and other racialized youth.

In 2014, a mural was commemorated as a memorial to youth from the Firgrove Social Housing community who lost their lives to violence. All of them people of colour, some as young as 15. Most were complete innocent victims, in the wrong place at the wrong time. Would you believe in a period of 15 years, 12 young people lost their lives to violence? This is in a community of 382 households.

Is the church committed to being in solidarity with these communities, and if so, are we committed to allocating resources? Or are we inward looking and mostly concerned about our own survival as a church institution?

I know there are no easy answers, especially when it means dismantling decades, if not centuries, of oppression. However, can we be open to God's Spirit and people who have been oppressed, to notice things differently, recognizing systemic racism and

The next time you hear of a shooting death in racialized poor community such as Jane and Finch, ask yourselves: Did the youth have the same opportunities that my child had? What supports could have been in place to prevent this?

privilege that many of us have experienced and taken for granted?



Faith Reflection

Kathy Yango

The theme of [Psalm 73](#) is about finding confidence to live in an unfair and corrupt world, where corrupt people are doing well, righteous people are suffering, and God seems far away. This psalm is also known as a plea for relief from oppressors. What might be your plea and prayer about systemic racism? What might you cry out for?



Children's Activity

Kathy Yango

Use the following episodes on TVOkids to spark conversations about racism with children.

[How Do You Feel?](#)

When Akin hears that a friend is dealing with racism at school, he turns to his trusted friend Duane and some young pals for advice. Akin also demonstrates how a “calm down kit” can be a useful tool when we’re feeling overwhelmed.

[That TVOkids Show: Racism Special](#)

In this special episode on racism, Laura is joined by TVO kid Amara, Child Counselor Duane, and The Honourable Ahmed Hussen (former Minister of Families, Children and Social Development) to answer questions about systemic racism.



Group Commitment

Kathy Yango

When watching, listening to, or reading the news from now on, reflect on the impact of some of these stories on people who are

Indigenous or racialized. Consider how Indigenous or racialized peoples and communities are being adversely affected by the situations

described in the news items. What might you commit to doing in response?



Advocacy

Kathy Yango

Watch the video [What Systemic Racism Looks Like in Canada](#).

- What fresh insights about historical and recent examples of systemic racism in Canada have you learned?
- Brainstorm what real action you could take to counter systemic racism. This exercise could be even more effective if done in the context of a discussion group, where a group action might be agreed upon.



Barry Rieder is a community minister serving the low income culturally diverse community of Jane and Finch in the north west part of Toronto. It is a ministry of presence and his role is to provide community development support, offer pastoral care and be engaged in advocacy through coalitions and networks.



Kathy Yango is currently a teacher with the Toronto District School Board. Previously, she worked in international development in the Philippines, focusing on team-building curriculum and education programs in marginalized communities.

