

**Resource Manual**

**Race In the American Church**

**Laura Osborne**

## **Introduction**

God has placed me in youth ministry for a reason. That reason gets revealed more and more as the years go on. There are a lot of topics that get discussed in our youth group, but diversity of race hasn't been one that comes up much, but it needs to and will start to. Race, diversity, racism, and reconciliation are not words that are brought together in with the youth that I work with. There are a lot of things that we need to learn as Christians when it comes to youth and diversity. As leaders in the church we need to keep a pulse on the youth culture but we also need to pay attention to the needs of the community and the changing world around us. Prayer needs to be started in all of our churches as far as diversity and racial reconciliation. There are many churches that have started to pray and have started the conversation. We all need a place to start and with youth in the church and the communities that surround the church, the place that we need to start in with prayer. Then we need to start the conversation on race, and diversity. This part of a larger manual project focuses on youth around junior and senior age ranges and provides resources to get the conversation started.

### **Interviews of two churches that are diverse or trying to be diverse**

I interviewed two women that live in two different areas of the United States. These women I know very well and value their opinion highly. They are both in different contexts that I am in as well. I am in a smaller community in South West Michigan. Our church is primarily Caucasian in make-up; there are some Black and Hispanic students in the youth group and a Pacific Islander couple that regularly attends worship. This is the typical make-up of churches in our area. The more towards Chicago we go, the more mixed it gets.

The first woman that I interviewed is from Zeeland, Michigan. She has recently moved here from Poughkeepsie, New York though, so that is why I chose to ask her a few questions. She has been in Reformed churches for many years now and knows the ins and outs of the RCA church. I asked her a few questions on Race in the church. My first question was; what has been your experience with race/racism in the church? Her response was “None - it has never come up as an issue.” This was a typical answer to people I talked to about this issue.

The next question I asked was; what is the ethnic makeup of the church you are currently in or have recently been a part of? Her response was “My new church has few African Americans - a few more Latinos, but still mostly white. It matches the demographic make-up of the town, though. My old church was in a mostly black neighborhood, but we had NO black congregants.” I had asked her in the original questions to think about her context here in West Michigan and in New York. I find it fascinating that her church in New York was in a mostly black neighborhood, but didn't have a mix of people at the church. She has also told me time and again, that the church has hardly any outreach programs and is struggling, I am not sure if the two issues are related or not.

The last question was; do you have any other thoughts on race/ racism in the church? Her response was “Is it really an issue in the RCA? I know there's a big initiative to attract persons of color, but is that in reaction to some incident I don't know about?” I followed this up with another question; is it a problem? Her response was “I truly don't know.” Then another follow up question; should our churches be more diverse? And; is there a need to be more diverse? Her response was “Sure - diversity adds to all of our experiences. But should attracting one segment of our diverse culture take precedence over another? I'm not so sure. How about trying to attract the poor? Or single parents? Is this the "easy" diversity problem to address? I'm not convinced there is a need, but I have an open mind about it. I don't want to sound like a racist or someone with my head in the sand - I just don't understand where the RCA is coming from”.

Overall there were some interesting answers to the questions. There doesn't seem to be any race issues in the churches other than there aren't really other ethnic groups represented. I did like her response about ‘diversity adds to all of our experiences’.

The other woman that I interviewed has been in the Reformed church for a long time as well. She grew up and lived in South West Michigan for a long time and has lived out in

Southern California and now works at the Crystal Cathedral, so her view has changed a lot in the last year. She reflects on her work in Kalamazoo and in southern California.

The church in Kalamazoo “wanted desperately to be more diverse.” There were only a few black members. There was one Hispanic single mom with 5 kids; one Asian couple with 2 kids. The church is on the North Side of Kalamazoo and the senior pastor worked hard with the other black churches and had partnerships with them.”

Her thoughts on the Crystal Cathedral... “Our school houses children that speak 16 languages. We have a translator for Sunday worship. Guests go to balcony and are connected with translators in their own language. Tons of diversity. Last new member’s class welcomed homeless black man, impoverished Caucasian woman, disabled woman, Buddhist, 3 Asian, 1 Filipino, 2 sr. Dutch couples, and Hispanics. When I teach a class, I often have to meet separately or extra with a person or two who has difficulty with language. We had prayer requests in Russian on Sunday night. Group of Buddhist monks were outside of my office on Thursday getting their picture taken with Jesus walking on the water. I cannot assume that people have a Bible in their own language, or that they fully understand the English version. Language is a huge barrier in explaining the gospel. Symbols are different...”

Racism: “Hispanic vs. Hispanic illegal’s. The pastor of community missions is often looked down upon because of her ethnicity and that she is a woman and sometimes struggles with English. My entire world view has changed. My vision of what heaven looks like. I am more intentional about the words I choose because they can be easily misunderstood. I have learned certain quirky things about different cultures that surprisingly enough tend to live in neighborhoods with people like them, not integrated like I thought they would be! Korean: do not respect women leaders. They are very bold and demanding of church. Hispanic: Church service starts late and finishes when it finishes. They greet each other with hugs. Time is different. Males plan weddings. Invite guests to come 1/2 hour before wedding so they won't be late. Buddhist/Hindu: many have Jesus as one of the gods. Incorporate into already existing religious beliefs. Hispanics celebrate daughters 15th birthday which is a quinceanera - a wedding with a court of at least 15. No groom, just a huge party. The Filipino and Korean weddings have different symbols as do the Hispanic weddings. Some of these include cords, coins, veils, Bible, sponsors, etc. Pastors must be very flexible.”

These two different portrayals of Race in the church are incredible. It is amazing to see how the second woman views ministry and the church differently than the first. The second woman has so many more things to think about, and it has made her a better person and has “changed her worldview” as she says. I think that is one of the key points to diversity; it opens up our views of ministry and the kingdom of God.

The first church interviewed wasn't doing anything with youth and didn't seem to try to be starting anything as well. The second church was very diverse and was working on the how they can integrate more of the lives of the teens with each other. The area that they live in is very diverse as it is, but they are making sure that the church pays close attention to that fact and bring it into the church.

## **On-Site Observation of the Church- Christian Life Center**

On Sunday April 6<sup>th</sup> my husband Kevin and I attended the church on the North Side of Kalamazoo called Christian Life Center. They have converted an old grocery store (I believe Meijer) into a church. I am not sure how long it has been around for but they have very strong, solid ministries. The church from what I saw on Sunday was about 80% black and 20% white. I didn't see much more diversity than that. It has a wonderful layout and is quite east to get around. Before we even got to our seats we were greeted six times. People were very friendly. We received a welcome packet and were asked to fill out a response card to put in the offering basket. There were about 12-15 ushers. We could have gone to a certain room after the service to receive a gift, but we didn't have time after the service. They made visitors feel very welcomed.

I will just walk through the worship service and point out my observations. The service started sharply at 10am with about 40% of the congregation already seated and ready to go. The worship through singing lasted about 40 minutes and when that was finished the rest of the congregation had showed up. There was a greeting time that followed and lasted a good five minutes. People went all over the sanctuary to greet people. We felt very welcomed by those around us.

The children at this point were asked to come forward and there were people with different colored flags that came up to the front and we prayed over the children and they went to their classrooms.

The next thing that we did was take the offering. There was a short time of explaining what the offering was and where it was going to. Then the pastor prayed over the offering and the baskets were passed.

The next part was the teaching time. This was about a 45 minute sermon, that jumped all over the place and was quite fun to listen too. The pastor had a main point of raising our spiritual I.Q., and we looked at Romans 11:33-36-12:1-2.

He kept asking through the sermon 'are you here?'. He wanted to know if we were present in the service. He had us repeat some key point throughout. He would say 'someone say...'" fill in the blank with what he was talking about. There was a lot more interaction on the part of the congregation with the pastor. People would shout or say words here and there out loud, or clap. There was a more participatory attitude of the congregation.

I would say that I fit in well with this church and if I wasn't employed at another church, I would come back to. The people were very friendly. I would have to explore more into the church on how to get plugged in and to get to know some people better.

The service ended at noon right after we took the Lord's Supper. The pastor read the scripture in 1 Corinthians about the last supper. The Lord's Supper was short, but it was well done.

There was a decent amount of diversity in the youth and children that were at the church. I am not sure about the youth program but I know that they are partnering with churches in the Kalamazoo area to do some racial reconciliation on the faith side and work through some of the common assumptions or problems.

Overall a great visit to another church, my husband and I felt very welcomed and we were very glad to have gone.

### **Organizations and Their Web Addresses**

#### **Reformed Church in America**

[www.RCA.org](http://www.RCA.org)

-The Reformed Church in America has many different links on their website to articles/discussion forums/etc, on multiracial activities, and thoughts. The RCA also has a section on youth ministry. The two can be helpful together on bringing some light on racial issues.

#### **Presbyterian Church/USA**

<http://www.pcusa.org/racialjustice/>

-The Presbyterian Church has a great deal of resources that deal with race relations in the church. There are discussions on race relations in public schools and in the church. The website also has links to other sites as well as opportunities for training.

#### **Multiethnic Education Program**

<http://www.multiethniceducation.org/links.html>

-The Multi-ethnic Education Program webpage has dozens of links to other sites that deal with youth and multi racial issues.

#### **Learning NC- A division of Chapel Hill School of Education**

<http://www.learnnc.org/search?phrase=racial%20issues>

-This is a website that is dedicated to helping in K-12 teaching and learning. There are many articles on racial issues. From history to politics to the classroom. This website is helpful because it brings the racial issues to bring them to the forefront

#### **Youth For Christ**

<Http://www.kalamazooyfc.org>

-The Kalamazoo Youth for Christ and the Youth For Christ main offices have been working with youth for decades and the subject of race within these groups. Youth For Christ is in 21 countries and works with all sorts of youth and programs. The Kalamazoo chapter is located in the heart of Kalamazoo and works with many church/schools/organizations to reach youth for Christ. Race is a topic that they are working on and how to get youth to make relationships with other people outside their race.

## **Written Resources on Racism/Diversity Education**

### **1. Teaching Tolerance**

<http://www.tolerance.org/index.jsp>

All the resources listed in this section are from the website tolerance.org. These resources are helpful in the classroom of public schools or can be used in the church in a youth group setting or a Christian Education class. Even though these resources are not of faith-based origin, they can be easily tailored to be used in the church setting by adding the Bible into it. (Each resource has it's own description as well)

#### **Teaching Tolerance**

Published twice a year, our magazine profiles educators, schools and programs promoting diversity and equity in inspirational and replicable ways.



#### **Mighty Times: The Legacy of Rosa Parks**

Recommended for middle and upper grades, this Academy Award-nominated documentary film and accompanying resources bring the Montgomery Bus Boycott alive for today's students.



#### **Mighty Times: The Children's March**

Recommended for middle and upper grades, this special teachers' edition of the Academy Award-winning documentary film and accompanying resources tell the heroic story of the young people in Birmingham, Alabama, who brought segregation to its knees.



### America's Civil Rights Movement

The story of the struggle to end official apartheid in the U.S. is told through the Academy Award-winning film, "A Time for Justice," and accompanying resources designed for middle and upper grades.



### One Survivor Remembers

Designed for use in grades 8-12, this Academy Award-winning documentary film tells the empowering story of Holocaust survivor Gerda Weissman Klein. The kit includes primary documents drawn from Klein's private collection, along with a teacher's guide and resource booklet.



### A Place at the Table

Narrated entirely by young people, this historical documentary for middle and upper grades tells the story of the United States' struggle to ensure liberty and justice for all. A book component and lesson plans are also included.



### Shadow of Hate

Episodes of intolerance throughout U.S. history — from the plights of Quakers in colonial New England to the 1991 riots in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, N.Y. — are examined using video, text, and classroom activities for grades 7-12.

## **2. A New Church/A New World**

**[http://www.ucc.org/justice/advocacy\\_resources/pdfs/anti-racism/a-new-world-a-new-church-anti-racism-training.pdf](http://www.ucc.org/justice/advocacy_resources/pdfs/anti-racism/a-new-world-a-new-church-anti-racism-training.pdf)**

As a result of participating in this study, participants will be able to:

- 1) Identify examples that expose the systemic and subtle nature of contemporary racism in U.S. society and the church;

- 2) Describe the importance of power in defining racism and how it works within U.S. society and its institutions; and
- 3) State their own commitment to continue the learning process and to work actively against racism.

The United Church of Christ has been working on some new materials for racism training and discussions. (Resource attached)

### **3. Learning to Count to One**

#### **The Joy and Pain of Becoming a Multiracial Church**

Alfred E. Mulder

This book offers stories of believers from diverse backgrounds to tell the story of one denomination on its way to becoming a united family drawn from every people, language, and nation. This book can be helpful in youth ministries as well. Everyone has a story and everyone needs to share that story. I think through prayer and conversation healing can begin. The conversation has started but we need to add prayer into it to become one in Christ.

#### **4. One Body One Spirit –Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches**

**George Yancy**

-This book is helpful in ways because it describes some ways that churches can get started in becoming multiracial. The church and the youth group need to be on the same page as far as who the target is. Are they targeting the inner-city folks around them or those from the neighboring suburbs? This book is helpful in starting that conversation.

#### **5. Explore Diversity (WWM 6-8, Year 1, Unit 8) Walk With Me- Faith Alive Christian Education curriculum.**

Sessions: 4

A study on cultural differences for grades 6-8. Sample chapter at the link below.  
[http://shop5.gospelcom.net/isroot/FaithAlive/SiteImages/Images\\_pdfs/cpmk\\_1-59255-155-6\\_samp01.pdf](http://shop5.gospelcom.net/isroot/FaithAlive/SiteImages/Images_pdfs/cpmk_1-59255-155-6_samp01.pdf)

Product Full Description...

The Explore Series (*Walk With Me* 6-8, Year 1) features studies that focus on Christian living.

*Explore Diversity* includes these 4 sessions:

- Differences That Divide
- One Family in Christ
- Breaking Down Barriers
- Celebrating Our Differences

In a user-friendly way the staff at Faith Alive Resources has come up with lessons to walk students through the Bible and see what is said on diversity and breaking down barriers. This can be helpful to see how those barriers got put up in the first place.

## **6. My Passion for the Multiethnic Jesus**

*by Efrem Smith*

-In this article there is thoughts on ‘was Jesus white or not’ there is arguments for the multiethnic Jesus. Unification and Reconciliation are highlighted throughout the article. This article can be used as teaching points in a bigger series on diversity and race. The youth can be broken up into teams to discuss section of the article and see where they fit in.

(Resource attached)

## **7. Turning the Tide of Risky Teen Behavior**

*by Saleem Ghubril*

-This article focuses on risky teen behavior and the choices that we make and the consequences that they have. Teens have a lot on their minds and there are many things that are floating through their lives and it can be tough to figure out what is going on especially when it come to diversity, this article is helpful in understanding these things, and starting to look a but farther and wider on the subject. (Resource attached)

## **8. The Second Chance and Race Relations**

<http://www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/culture/carr-Taylorinterview.pdf>

-In this article, they are discussing a movie that is coming out and how it is trying to break down barriers. The focus of the movie ‘The Second Chance’ is so that it will have an effect on youth. This article can be the stepping stone to seeing the movie, even showing it at a youth meeting.

(Resource attached)

## **9. Youth Leadership, Racism, and Intergroup Dialogue**

Copyright Year: 2006

“The National Conference for Community and Justice Greater Kansas City's Youth Leadership Institute (Anytown) for high school-aged youth-is designed to expose young people to multicultural issues and topics and facilitate purposeful intergroup dialogue on addressing systemic oppression and privilege. An evaluation was conducted over a three-year period to determine whether the Anytown programming had an effect on changing the knowledge and attitudes of participants concerning a variety of racial/ethnic groups. At the beginning of the first

day of the 7-day residential institute and again at the end of the last day, the students completed a self-report survey rating a series of statements concerning their knowledge and attitudes. At the end of each day, the students also answered open-ended questions concerning what they had learned during the day. Frequencies, t-tests, ANOVA comparisons, and content analyses were conducted. In every area measured by the preand post-Institute surveys, there was a statistically significant positive change, at the 95% or higher confidence level, in respondents' ratings of their knowledge and attitudes.”

Journal Title: Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work:

Innovations in theory, research and practice

Formerly titled Journal of Multicultural Social Work

**Volume:** 15 **Issue:** 1/2

**ISSN:** 1531-3204 **Pub Date:** 2/20/2007

## **10. Color My World- The Promise and Perils of Life in the New Multiracial Mainstream**

Newsweek article, May 8, 2000 <http://www.newsweek.com/id/83992/page/2> By Ana

Figeroa, Julie Weingarden and Julie Edelson

-This article is written on a student who had to write an argumentative essay on multiracial students. She was excited to see what was happening in her world on this topic. She interviews many students to see their take on the issue. Parents and students alike are aware of the multiracial issues that go on in schools and there are groups to help with these issues, and they are stated in the article. (Resource attached)

## **11. God's Diverse and Unified Family**

**Christian Reformed Church In North America resource**

-This is a little booklet that discusses the issue of race in the CRC. This booklet works through key terms such as race and ethnicity. It also works through what Biblical basis they are working from. They are also encouraging folks to work through some of the resources that are listed and get more of a conversation going in their congregations.

## **Reflection**

This has been an interesting project all around. Youth live in a very strange and ever changing culture. Youth have many issues to deal with to start off with and to add diversity and racism to the ever growing list of issues to deal with. Youth are worrying about how they look, feel, who they are friends with, how they are getting along with their parents and how they are being accepted in school or not. Faith comes into play with this as well. Where does their faith lie with all that is happening in their worlds? There are a lot of things that are thrown at them from day to day.

As pastors we need to come along side the youth of America and try to steer them in the right direction in life and in faith. As far as diversity and youth there are not a lot of resources out there that are directed toward youth, but there is a lot that is on the horizon because this conversation is happening.

We as pastors of youth or pastors of the church need to take the time to discuss diversity in our churches and in youth ministries across the cities. If we are not even talking about this topic then how can things change? The conversation needs to start with the youth pastors and brought to the youth and their families and then can get drawn into the conversation then things can happen on reconciliation.

There has been a community worship event that has happened in Kalamazoo for the last 8 or so years and now the thoughts on this have been more and more of a crossing borders thought and how can we get our churches more involved with each other. The youth can get to know more and more youth that they would have never gotten to know before. Through worship, prayer, games, etc, the youth can mingle and realize who is of faith in their schools and make connections. The purpose of these worship events is to bring people together in faith and to show

that we can all worship as one under one God. We need to not be divided, but stand firm in our faith and get to know others that are not like us. This is a chance for renewal in the church and within the cities. I think that this may be starting in the church and moving into the workplaces, etc. With Christ with us, what man can be against us? With a Biblical backing and starting the conversation with youth, we can get very far. The conversation needs to get going among youth leaders, educators and lay persons.

Where do we go from here? Prayer , strongholds, conversations, and being real can be a place to start. First of all we need to pray for direction for our conversations and our teaching. We need to see where the youth are and what is holding them back from breaking down the barriers of racism. We also need to discuss in our youth groups and churches about what strongholds there are on us, and how we think. What mental models are holding us back? Having fierce conversations and being real about what is happening in the world needs to be in the forefront of our teaching. Things need to not be sugar coated so much and we need to be real with students about their faith and what is happening in the world, and find God in it all.

Conclusion

We need to get this conversation started. We need to be thinking about intentional ways that we can bring our youth together, through worship, service, or just plain fun activities to break down these barriers.

### **Discussion Questions**

What are we missing when it comes to talking to the youth of today as far as racism?

What walls need to be broken down?

In your experience what can be helpful ways to discuss this issue with youth or children?

How do we get this conversation started?