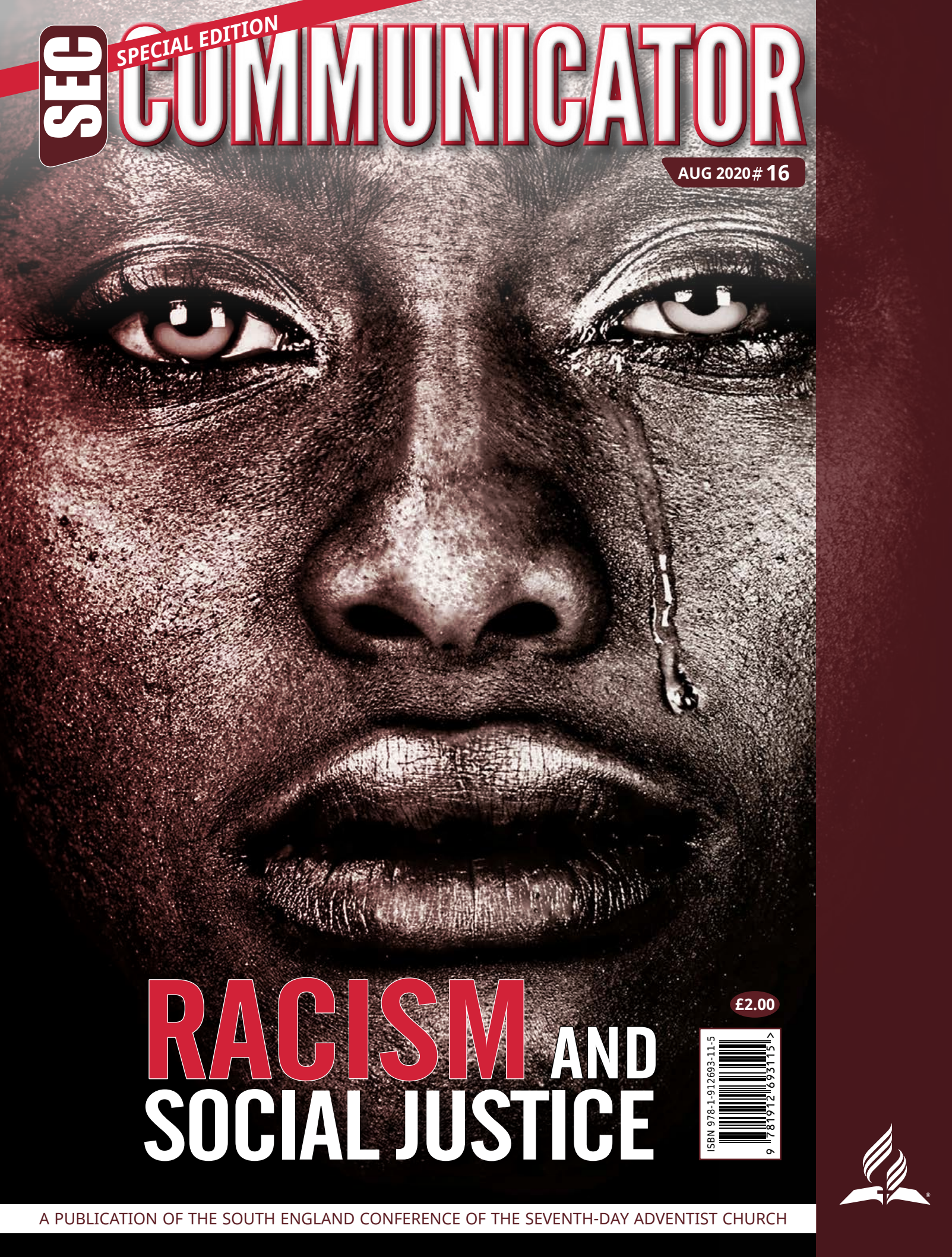


SEC

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RACISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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A PUBLICATION OF THE SOUTH ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH



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Editorial

The May 25 killing of George Floyd by a US Policeman in Minneapolis provoked global condemnation and widespread protests. People around the world from all ethnic backgrounds rallied against police brutality aimed at African Americans in particular. The way George Floyd died pleading to be allowed to breathe shocked people everywhere and was a callous affront to human dignity. This outrage caused thousands of people in cities all over the world to protest publicly in spite of Covid-19 lockdowns.

Why would a public official deem it right to kneel on the neck of another human being and refuse for nine minutes to respond to his pleas for his life? Is it any wonder that we see a concerted effort to deal with the root cause of the problem which is the inhumanity of racism? People are asking questions about the validity of honouring prominent people from the past who were involved in slavery. The statue of Edward Colson in Bristol was toppled and dumped in the river because he profited hugely from slavery which is directly linked to the current problem of racism which discriminates against people of colour.

Businesses and public institutions are examining their historical connections to slavery, directly or indirectly. The Bank of England has already apologised for the "inexcusable connections" of some past governors and directors to slavery and will

remove any portraits of them which are on display in its premises. Lloyds Bank, Oxford University and city councils across the country are following suit.

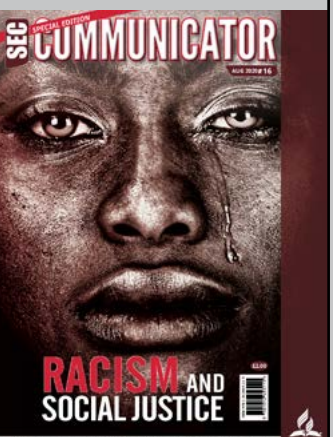
It would have been remiss of us not to join in the condemnation of a murder underpinned by bigotry. Leaders from across the North American Division have spoken out, condemning racism. So have leaders from the territories of the British Union Conference. The call to promote intentional social justice finds expression in the words of the prophet Micah, "...to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God."

In this special edition, our writers take a broad look at how our church should respond to the issue of racism and how we can promote social justice and racial harmony. Topics include, "Why It's Not Enough to Say I Am Not a Racist", "Apologies, Forgiveness" and "Ellen White and Social Justice".

Also, in this issue, we address the question, 'Do we need to rethink our structures?' The BUC President shares a simple understanding of our church structure. The TED Executive Secretary shares how we arrive at church policies.

The words of Isaiah come to mind in closing; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17 NKJV)

OUR COVER



SAM O. DAVIES
Editor

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the President's Desk

DR EMMANUEL OSEI



DEALING WITH RACISM ON THE GROUND

The term Racism has been defined as 'a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human racial groups determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to dominate others, or that a particular racial group is inferior to the others'. Another definition of racism is 'hatred or intolerance of another race or other races'.

In light of the above definition, there are two major issues that come to the forefront within our narrative and experience of 'racism'. Firstly, we are of one race, the human race, therefore what is termed as racism of one colour or nationality is actually a prejudicial construct of ignorance that promotes a hierarchy of shades and complexions. This topic of the plurality of 'races' is a contentious subject but holds little value when seen through the biblical lens of Creation.

Secondly, you cannot have racism within your own people-group. You can, however, have prejudice. Prejudice is defined as 'an affective feeling towards a person based on their perceived group membership. It is often used to refer to a preconceived, usually unfavourable, evaluation of another person, based on that person's personal characteristics and not based on actual experience.' Unfortunately, the term 'racism' is used flippantly and interchangeably with 'prejudice'.

Consequently, we cannot leave unchecked the black/white 'racism' experience within our church; but in the same breath, we can never

ignore the prejudice that exists within our own communities.

I have discovered that, as members of the SDA Church, we are tribal. We prefer the company of our own people-groups. We would travel past two or three churches to attend a church and worship with those whom we have much in common. Interestingly, within our people groups, we still have sub-divisions. For example, among the Romanian-speaking congregations, there are Romanians, Ukrainians, Hungarians and Moldovans. Among the Portuguese-speaking congregations, there are the Brazilians, Africans and those from Portugal. Among the Asian congregations, there are the Filipinos and Malaysians; then there are the Indians, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Nepalese. Among the black members in most of our congregations, we have Africans and West-Indians. Among the West-Indians we have different Islands, each with their own accents and patois. Sadly, racism and prejudice are promoted by those who, by their words and actions, believe the bigger island is superior to the smaller island. Among the inhabitants of the Islands, there are Indians, whites, Chinese, and blacks. They also have fallen into the racist and prejudicial belief that the lighter their complexion, the more superior they are.

When you consider the African continent, there are 54 countries with between 1500-2000 languages spoken. It becomes very easy for racism and prejudice to occur in such diversity. Regrettably, in our church we are not free from the ugly disease of racism, bigotry and prejudice. It is not a topic that we are comfortable speaking about, even though we know it exists. There may be reasons why we don't speak about this. Some people believe we are racists for even speaking about the subject, and that we are attempting to cause further divisions in the church. We would quicker share our racist and prejudicial thoughts with those of our own people group, and then publicly deny the fact

that we are closet-racists. It is only when racism rears its ugly head and is seen in its ugliness that we arise and are compelled to speak against it. This was evidenced in the case of the recent murder of George Floyd, which has served as a catalyst for many organisations to scrutinise their practices with the hope of dealing with systemic and institutionalised racism and prejudice.

Consequently, what happens when racism and prejudice are manifested in our church? We very often see this clearly when it comes to Sessions and local church elections. Racism and prejudice raise their ugly head during board and business meetings. The attitude and comments of some individuals demonstrate their racist, ignorant and prejudiced views. Where does one turn when they are victims of racism and prejudice? Is there any recourse for those who have been discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity?

As a church, we have been very silent on this matter and have allowed racism and discrimination to go unchecked. At our recent Directors Meeting, after two months of discussion and contemplation, we decided that the church can no longer remain silent. We took a decision to set up a committee and draw up terms of reference for a special committee which would meet and listen to those who have been victims of racism and prejudice. We felt it was necessary to give a voice to the voiceless and those marginalised because of their ethnicity. Racism, prejudice and discrimination are evil, devised by the Evil One to cause anarchy and separation from God's divine plan; and if left to fester, they will not only be detrimental to one's health on earth, but will cause one to lose out on eternal life.

So, remaining silent is not an option. Although we are at the initial stages of setting up this committee, we believe it is absolutely imperative for the health of our church as we move forward into the future. We cannot, we will not, allow the evil of racism, prejudice and discrimination to destroy this church that we love and that the Lord has died for.



ELLEN G. WHITE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The term "Social Justice" has gained popularity recently. Some believe it is a modern concept born out of Marxist ideology. However, social justice is older than creation. It is rooted in God's eternal law of love. Those who open themselves to God's love will want a society free of oppression, exploitation, poverty, violence and lopsided distribution of wealth.

When Moses collated the laws for the newly established nation, social justice was at the core. The rights of widows, orphans and indentured servants were protected. Statutes were in place to ensure the regular redistribution of wealth and provisions for the needy. There was even enough flexibility to adjust gender-biased laws when the daughters of Zelophehad raised their voices in protest (Numbers 27:1-11).

The constant refrain of social justice echoes throughout Hebrew society with Micah reminding the people, "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God?" (Micah 6:8). Understanding the restoration of societal justice as foundational to the gospel, Jesus himself would announce his mission as one that empowers the poor, sick, imprisoned and oppressed (Luke 4:18-19).

Given the central theme of social justice in scripture, one would expect that the premise would be embedded in the DNA of all who claim Divine paternity. Every born-again child of God should embrace the responsibility of confronting societal injustices. Ellen G. White, celebrated co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, understood this.

Those who allow themselves to be distracted by independent harbingers of fear in our denomination are probably under the impression that Sister White's main interest was personal piety. With venomous passion they stress a narcissistic theology that is steeped in monastic asceticism. While Sister White

was concerned about issues of health and self-control, she understood that these meant nothing for people who were not *living* the gospel.

In fact, she stresses that Christ Himself "interpreted the gospel to [people]" by sympathizing with the oppressed, feeding the hungry and healing the sick (*Welfare Ministry*, 56). Challenging members of the Seventh-day Adventist church to emulate His practice, she writes, "Practical work will have far more effect than *mere* sermonizing. We are to give food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and shelter to the homeless" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, 417).

Sister White's advice should not be viewed as mere acts of "community service," but it challenges the very core of our values. It's not just about giving to the poor but confronting the opulent rich, as Jesus did with the young ruler (Matt 19:16-24). She warns, "[God] never meant that one man should have an abundance of the luxuries of life while the children of others cry for bread" (*Testimonies* 6, 273). Those who gain fortunes by exploiting others are condemned as "transgressor[s] both of the principles and of the precepts of the word of God" (*Ministry of Healing*, 187).

God's people should be at the forefront of challenging societal inequities that disproportionately affect those who have been victimized by western colonial systems of oppression and exploitation. As we do this, Sister White challenges us to assess our own commitment to social justice with the reminder:

Jesus...identifies Himself with His suffering people. "It was I who was hungry and thirsty. It was I who was a stranger. It was I who was naked. It was I who was sick. It was I who was in prison. When you were enjoying the food from your bountifully spread tables, I was famishing in the hovel or street not far from you. When you closed your doors against Me, while your well-furnished

rooms were unoccupied, I had no where to lay My head.

Your wardrobes were filled with an abundant supply of changeable suits of apparel, upon which means had been needlessly squandered, which you might have given to the needy. I was destitute of comfortable apparel. When you were enjoying health, I was sick. Misfortune cast Me into prison and bound me with fetters, bowing down My spirit, depriving Me of freedom and hope, while you roamed free."

What a oneness Jesus here expresses as existing between Himself and His suffering disciples! He makes their case His own. He identifies Himself as being in person the very sufferer. Mark, selfish Christian: every neglect of the needy poor, the orphan, the fatherless, is a neglect of Jesus in their person (*Welfare Ministry*, 40).

May God help us all to be agents of social justice in a world that so desperately needs a witness to God's love.



DR KEITH A. BURTON

Ph.D. OOU & CAMROU
Dr. Keith Augustus Burton is a Professor of Spiritual Care at AdventHealth University. He previously served as the Founding Director of Adventist Muslim Relations at Oakwood University and the Chair of the Peace and Social Justice Program at Claremont Lincoln University. Most recently, he was named by Christianity Today as one of the top twenty-five religious figures who have shaped African-American faith over the past century.

WHY IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SAY 'I AM NOT A RACIST'

Racism is not only morally wrong; it is a sin. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians we are very concerned about sin and like to define it so that we can recognise and avoid it. We cite 'Sin is the transgression of the law' (1 John 3:4), and we hope that, by keeping all the ten commandments, we will be counted with Jesus' sheep on judgement day (Matthew 25:32, forwards).

However, from Matthew 5:21 onwards, Jesus challenges this minimal definition of sin. Sin is not just the physical act but an attitude. He redefines the sin of murder as inappropriate anger against a fellow human being. Sin is more pervasive than the legal definition implies. In a similar way, racism is more deeply rooted than many of us have acknowledged.

Since the death of George Floyd on 25th May, I have learned that it is not enough to say, 'I'm not a racist because I don't use the 'N-word and have black friends.' Like the sin problem, my unconscious racism is deeply embedded in my identity and history.

As a white Englishman (with a German mother), I have tried to re-evaluate my cultural identity. Simply being white has given me and my family opportunities and privileges that my black and minority ethnic (BAME) friends have had to work hard to achieve.

The first time I was told about 'white privilege' I rejected the idea. As a child of a long line of proud working-class ancestors, I could easily talk about 'middle class' privilege and how hard my parents had to work to climb the so-called 'social ladder'. The second time I tried to get my head around the concept of 'white privilege', my mind began to understand that my

history was like chalk and cheese when compared to my BAME friends' experiences. But I still struggled with the idea that I was a benefactor of 'white privilege' until a black friend said, 'I can get educated, but can never change the colour of my skin!'

As I prayed and pondered about this, a black friend patiently shared their story. As a BAME person, they would always be regarded by many people as 'inferior'. It was as if God suddenly said to me, 'Listen to their story with compassion and not judgment.' God opened my heart to realise how arrogant and indifferent my attitude had been to the racial suffering of my brothers and sisters in Christ.

A few weeks ago, I confessed to my largely black congregation that I was sorry that I've been such a slow learner and pledged to ask God to help me fight for justice as the Bible teaches.

I am proud to be British and, in my lifetime, I have experienced a reduction of racism following the terrible injustices of our colonial past. However, when I listen to my BAME friends' accounts of prejudice and often racial violence, I have to accept that racism, like sexism, is still prevalent. Jesus calls the majority to help the afflicted minority (Luke 4:18). As a white Christian, it is my calling to stand with the oppressed and speak out against all forms of injustice.

Most people I talk with know that I'm a pastor and they don't use racist language around me. Occasionally, when talking to neighbours, I may hear a racist insinuation. They are learning that I will try to tactfully challenge these attitudes. Being Jesus' salt in the world means I have to pray for courage to speak out, even if others do not like it.

I'd like to thank my black friends who have kindly helped me on this road towards becoming anti-racist. I've also been inspired by other books and talks.*

So, to summarise, systemic and general racism is real and is as pervasive as sin. White privilege is a given, and I am called to be more than 'not a racist' but a soldier of Christ, challenging racism wherever I experience it.

My prayer is that God will give us a desire to understand racism better and to guide us in our unique anti-racist ministries, so that together we can model the power of Christ's love in this broken world.

**We Need to Talk About Race* by Ben Lindsay, *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo; <https://youtu.be/HrOFpaB-PQI>



BERNIE HOLFORD

Pastor Bernie Holford currently serves as the Senior Pastor for Luton North and Luton Central. Prior to this role, he served as Family Ministries Director at the South England Conference before being invited to serve as President for the Scottish Mission.

TRUTH AND THE RACIAL PANDEMIC OF IGNORANCE



DR GIFFORD RHAMIE

BA MA PhD FAETC
Senior Lecturer in Ethnicity and Culture in Early Christianity & Contemporary Praxis and Director of Field Education at Newbold College of Higher Education

Residents living in the north western state of Punjab, India, recently reported that they can see the Himalayas for the first time in 30 years. Can you imagine living next door to the tallest mountain range in the world, so huge and imposing, for 30 years and not being able to see it because of pollution? The lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has launched the lifting of this gross pollution. Now they can see the whole truth: the unadulterated beauty and splendour of the Himalayas.

The lockdown has also uncovered what some regard as an even worse (if not the worst) pollution-pandemic of the past 500 years. Yet, most people living in Britain (not to mention the so-called West) have not even seen it despite its proximity. I'm talking about the Himalayas of racism.

Many people – black, brown and white – especially young people, have taken to the streets across the world since the fatal day of George Floyd's murder on 25 May at the 'knee' of the police. Yet this largely peaceful, but dynamic uprising, which has pulled the plaster off the deep, throbbing wound of racism, has caused immense division in our country, our church and our homes. For the first time in my lifetime – and I'm no longer young – I've been bombarded by questions and conversations about race: what it means and how we're meant to erase its demonic parent, racism. Yes, before the concept of 'the races' was the creation of racism. The hierarchy within the human race, with the white 'race' at the top and black 'race' at the bottom and all others in between, was invented by church and state in order to justify racism. This racism was meted out through the enslavement of African people and later the colonisation (rape and pillage) of their (and other dark peoples') land. And this Himalayas of a global scandal has loomed unnoticed, if ignored, even in the 21st century. It has been hidden by thick pollution. Until now!

I refer to this pandemic-pollution as the politics of ignorance. By ignorance I'm not referring to stupidity or idiocy, although these are never far. I'm referring to organised, wilful and structural ignorance that is state sponsored and manufactured as 'knowledge'. Let me give you an example. We have a white friend who got really upset about the recent toppling of some of the statues of slave traders. He felt that his time in the armed forces for queen and country – meaning our pristine history – was rendered null and void by a mass of ungrateful, brittle and unpatriotic young people. He couldn't see the fuss! When I told him that I

saw where he was coming from because I used to feel the same – at least up until my early teens – he was shocked; especially at what I told him next. I shared what I discovered back then: that what we were taught in school was one big lie! The stories of Captain Cook, Christopher Columbus, David Livingstone and Francis Drake (to name a few) as heroic explorers – and this is still taught in schools by the way (I should know since I had the horror of seeing this in my child's homework) – are a massive cover-up of Empire and genocidal exploitation of dark peoples. This erasure continues to be manufactured as our island's history, as 'knowledge'. Now, no matter how many halos these pedestalled 'saints' have accrued, our Christian values must venerate them for what they are: a piercing gong and a clanging cymbal – hollow holiness because of their 'bloody' past.

Now, I'm not mounting an argument for the toppling of statues. That's for another article. My point is, national ignorance has masterfully shaped our nation's education and commodified it as 'knowledge'. Such wrongful but intentional ignorance feeds racism and is happily but uncritically coopted by many. And this complicity, unwitting or not, is an abomination! Why can't we teach the whole truth? It's the truth, in Jesus's words, that will set us free.

Recently, Dr John Baildam, principal of Newbold College of Higher Education, issued a written and digitally broadcast apology for the sins of racism perpetuated at Newbold. In a subsequent staff meeting via Zoom, he read out some of the most brutally honest testimonies of racism by students past and present. I didn't anticipate my response. I found myself welling-up that I had to turn off my cam. I wept uncontrollably for some 15 minutes. In those heart-breaking moments, I saw myself, my children and my students, and I couldn't keep down the realisation that despite these Himalayas stories looming large Newbold couldn't see them because of the pollution of inherited ignorance that they and the wider nation had bought into. Now that the pollution is being lifted, Newbold is taking bold steps to redeem its situation. This involves being on the right side of history in telling the whole truth of our history, owning it and generating transformational change. Decolonising the educational system is the key to this change. Likewise, our church in Britain, yea the world, won't change until our education of the bible and Christianity with respect to race and ethnicity (not to mention gender and patriarchy) changes. The truth must set us free!

WHY THE NEED TO APOLOGISE

This article includes two statements emanating from Newbold College of Higher Education. The first is a statement made by the Principal, Dr John Baildam, in the light of the killing of George Floyd:

The cruel, brutal and unacceptable death of George Floyd on 25 May has served as the springboard for the 'Black Lives Matter' response and reaction by countless thousands around the world. Although we are rightly proud of our own multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Newbold community, this gives us all pause for reflection. Do we always get things right, even on the modern-day Newbold campus? 'Black Lives Matter' serves as a timely catalyst as we seek to review our values and endeavour to strengthen our determination that our College will always be welcoming and open to all, regardless of race, colour, culture, tribe, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or (dis)ability - and that each individual student and employee will be treated as an equal member of the Newbold family. At the beginning of the past academic year, we all explored together Newbold's IDEA- 'Inclusion, Diversity, Equality, Awareness'- reminding our community that we will not tolerate racism or discrimination of any kind. For months we have been grappling with the ramifications of COVID-19, and yet Raheem Sterling, the England and Manchester City striker, reminds us that "the only disease right now is the racism we are fighting". As a staff, we had planned for training sessions on racial awareness during the past semester. Due to so many colleagues being furloughed over the last few weeks, we had to choose to reschedule these developmental initiatives until such time as everyone can learn and benefit from them. We have all been created in God's image - but we are challenged once more to ask ourselves whether we recognise the image of God in another person whose ethnicity, whose culture, whose language, whose faith and whose ideals may be quite different from our own. If we do not, then we have made God in our own image rather than allowing Him to recreate us in His image. We at Newbold fully support the timely reminder that 'Black Lives Matter' and we pray for wisdom as we play our part in ensuring a united future.

After this statement was released, the College received a number of positive comments, but also some responses and reactions which led Dr Baildam and his senior leadership team of Mrs Abigail Wright (Chief Financial Officer) and Ms Serena Santona (Academic Registrar) to formulate a further statement of apology

with an accompanying video. The text reads as follows:

Since the 'Black Lives Matter' statement which I made recently in the light of the killing of George Floyd, we have been shocked and disappointed to hear from current students, staff and alumni of unacceptable incidents of racism and discrimination at Newbold College of Higher Education. I am grateful to those of you who have so courageously and bravely taken the time to communicate your feelings of pain and hurt with us. This has been no easy thing to do. We have let you down, and we will strive to put things right.

The current watershed has given us all pause for ongoing thought as we reflect on your distress and suffering, which we wish to recognise openly and properly. While we cannot re-write our College's history, together we can all help to shape its future. We acknowledge past and present wrongs perpetrated on racial grounds, while reiterating that racist or discriminatory behaviour is not in harmony with God's ideal. We are sorry for all failures in this regard on the part of the College, and we ask for forgiveness for every heartache or anguish caused or felt.

Elie Wiesel stresses that "what hurts the victim the most is ... the silence of the bystander". We promise to ensure that black lives really do matter on our campus and we ask you to help us to make this an everyday reality. We have already called a meeting for next Monday of a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Audit and Strategy Panel. Chaired by our Chaplain, Pastor Alastair Agbaje, this group will comprise a number of students and staff. Now is the time for us to listen, and so - difficult though this may be - we ask you to find the strength to voice your experiences so that together we can find the practical solutions needed for change. There is a lot of work ahead of us all, but we are ready to change things for the better. Do look out for further initiatives, which will include a virtual open dialogue session.

As an ethnically and culturally diverse Senior Leadership Team ourselves, my colleagues Mrs Abigail Wright (Chief Financial Officer), Ms Serena Santona (Academic Registrar) and I, as Principal,

are proud of the rich multi-ethnic and multi-national heritage of our College students and staff. We wish to serve as examples of justice and equality. We concur with Ellen White, who reminds us that "when the love of Christ is cherished in the heart ... no difference will be made because of the colour of the skin". Racism, prejudice and intolerance of any kind have no place here, and we are committed to working intentionally to eradicate any traces of such.

Newbold's campus must be a safe and welcoming place for all, regardless of race, colour, culture, tribe, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability or ability.

We know that whatever we say may never be enough, but we thank you for giving us the chance to right any wrongs.

At the time of writing, the promised BAME Audit and Strategy Panel has met for three lengthy meetings. Members have included representation from staff and students who have shared examples of hurt and pain and who have devised a large number of proposals for the way forward. These have also been shared with all staff. The College is forming a standing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Panel to be chaired by an external EDI Consultant with appropriate student and staff membership. EDI staff training is planned for the first week of September, and policies and curricula are in the process of review to ensure that racist behaviours are eradicated from the campus. EDI awareness will also form part of the College's induction processes for all students and staff.



DR JOHN BILDAM

Principal, Newbold College of Higher Education

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

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WHAT IS WHITE PRIVILEGE?



JACQUE VENTER

*Associate Executive Secretary,
British Union Conference.*

I love to go to the British Museum at least once a year and sometimes more than once, especially when we have visitors who have never been to England before. There is just something compelling and extraordinary about going to the British Museum. My favorite parts of the museum are the archaeological findings that give credence to narratives in the Bible such as the Cyrus Cylinder.

Recently, I learned that the founding collection of 71,000 pieces was bequeathed by Sir Hans Sloane, a medical doctor, collector and slave owner, upon his death in 1753. I also learned that the enormous colonnade at the entrance, completed in 1852, mimics the architecture of ancient Athens, and the neo-classical style of buildings all around the museum owes itself to the fact that at the time while the British Empire was expanding, Britain saw itself as the cultural and intellectual successors of the Greeks and Romans.

The museum holds approximately 8 million objects from every corner of the globe. All these jewels brought together like this have one obvious tale to tell. A tale constructed to remind us of Britain's place in the world and a testament to the audacity of power.

In her book, *Superior: The Return of Race Science*, Angela Saini reflects on her own obsession with the British Museum

and then makes this statement in the opening pages:

"When I set out to write this book, I wanted to understand the biological facts around race. What does modern scientific evidence really tell us about human variation, and what do our differences mean? I read the genetic and medical literature, I investigated the history of the scientific ideas, I interviewed some of the leading researchers in their fields. What became clear was that biology can't answer this question, at least not fully. The key to understanding the meaning of race is understanding power. When you see how power has shaped the idea of race and continues to shape it, how it affects even the scientific facts, everything finally begins to make sense."¹

The point Saini makes is that those in power hold the pen that determines the narrative future generations will live under. Just think about the statues all over the UK that are suddenly under scrutiny, statues built over the past two centuries, memorializing individuals' contributions to society; contributions brought about on the back of the profits of slave trading and slave owning, and a constant reminder that those in power hold the pen that determines the narrative generations will live under.

The British Museum is a collective example of this power. Consider, for example, all of the objects it holds. Why are they there and not where they were first made? Why do they live inside the museum in London with its neo-classical columns stretching into the sky? Because that's how power works. It takes, it claims, and it keeps. It makes you believe that this is where they belong.

¹ Saini, Angela. (2020). *Superior: The return of race science*. London: Fourth Estate.

The global power, as it played out over the past five hundred years, meant that treasures from all over the world could and would end up in a museum like this. Britain and other European powers were the latest colonizers, the most recent winners. This imperial mindset gave us the feeling that we have the right to take things. It gave us the right to document history our way, to define the scientific facts about humankind. European thinkers told us that our cultures were better, that we were proprietors of thought and reason, and we married this with the notion that we belong to a superior race.

However, as Christians we believe that the True Narrative of humanity is something very different. We believe that Christ's earthly life testifies of this narrative. We believe that Christ's earthly life testifies of our loving heavenly Father who sacrificially wanted us to understand the true narrative of the worth of human beings created in His image. At every opportunity, Jesus spoke into the false narrative of human worth. And one of the most iconic biblical parables where Jesus spoke into the false narrative of human worth is found in Luke 10:30-37.

³⁰ Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. ³³ But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' ³⁶ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" ³⁷ And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Since the killing of George Floyd this parable has been on my mind. Besides other lessons we can draw from this parable, it has impressed upon me to the following since George Floyd's death:

Although Jesus died for our salvation, it appears what brought about his crucifixion was the way he

“ The parable of the Good Samaritan has taught me over the past several months that I can either choose to act and speak like Jesus to bring about a new narrative, a more beautiful and eternal narrative of Godly equity; or I can, like the young man in this narrative, walk away and silence the struggle of human equity and salvation. ”

lived for justice and human equity.

By my silence and my unwillingness to see color, my actions will either perpetuate the false narrative of human equity that is still part of society's narrative as shaped by those in power. Or my actions will sacrificially, like Jesus, reveal a more beautiful eternal narrative of human equity and salvation.

It is clear from Jesus' earthly ministry that he lived out his mission, according to Isaiah 11:4 — 'With righteousness He shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth'; and, according to Isaiah 61 — 'The Lord loves justice'.

It is clear to me from this parable that Jesus was addressing the false narrative as it was shaped by those in political and religious power for centuries before. The Jews could not stand the gentiles. The term 'gentile' was given to any person other than a "pure" Jew. To Jews, gentiles were predestined to be lost unless they conformed to the purest and strictest rules of Judaism. Even then, there was a sense that they were less valuable to God, because they were not of the bloodline of Abraham.

Samaritans were considered to be even lower in worth than gentiles. They were a mixed race of Jewish and Syrian heritage as a result of Assyrian invasions in the sixth century before Christ. Just remind yourself of the time when James and John felt that it would have been appropriate for Jesus to call fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans.

When Jesus is therefore given the opportunity to

teach his Jewish audience what human kindness looks like, he speaks into their false narrative of human equity, turns it upside down and upholds the "other than us" person as a model for human kindness.

The significance to me here is that Jesus was trying to tell them something about their Jewishness that black and other ethnic minorities are trying to tell me about my whiteness today. The intellectual Jew's response to Jesus' question at the end of the parable is telling of my own ignorance not too long ago. So, which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." I'm going to give this intellectual Jew the benefit of the doubt that it was not his intention to deliberately ignore the value of the Samaritan in the parable. Yet, even when I do, it reminds me so powerfully of the time I told one of my black pastoral colleagues that I didn't see her color. Now I look back in horror at my ignorance for suggesting to her that I do not see her for who she really is- a beautiful, amazing person and pastor.

Just imagine what daily life must have been like for a Samaritan within the social, religious and political structures of 1st century Judaism that demonstrates systemic, institutional racism. These deeply meaningful reflections on this passage over the past few months were further informed when a good friend shared with me a video series entitled, *The Wound*². It describes the dilemma of systemic white privilege, something I can, from experience, confirm is definitely true. In part two of this series of videos, Dr Donn Leathermann describes the dehumanizing inequality of white privilege in the following way:

"One of the problems when we talk about white privilege is that a lot of white people feel like guilt is being thrust upon them for something. And they look at what they're doing, and they say, "I haven't done anything wrong. I did not hurt anybody. I did not throw any stereotypes around or any racial epithets. What are they talking about when they say white privilege? And the fact is, white privilege is a sort of invisible thing from this side. When we look at the way we are treated. Let's say by other people in a story, by policemen, or by whoever it is, we evaluate this treatment and we say, 'That's just normal.' That's the way you're supposed to treat people, so that I expect that

the cashier in the supermarket is going to be reasonably polite to me and ring up my sale and tell me to have a nice day. I expect when the policeman stops me, he is going to write me a ticket without saying anything nasty about me, without doing anything dangerous, without shooting me. I expect to be treated normally. And the truth is, the way I'm treated is normal and that's the point. White privilege is not about people doing something wrong. It's about other people not being treated right. It's the deficit in the way black people, Hispanic people, other people are treated, and we can't really experience it. Obviously, I never had a black skin, never had a Spanish accent, never lived in a female body. I never had any experience except the one I got. And so, I never perceive somebody treating me unfairly. I'd have to be in that experience to know it. And the truth is, the kind of treatment that I get as a white person is nothing I need to be ashamed of. I have not done anything wrong. And the person who is interacting with me hasn't done anything wrong either. We're not breaking any laws or hurting anybody or doing anything immoral. The problem is, other people aren't treated this way. The truth is, if you want to put it this way: There is absolutely nothing wrong with white privilege, except the fact that it is not everybody's privilege and there's the problem"

Paul's words in Galatians 3:28-29 is a reminder that Jesus spoke into the false human narrative of equity during his earthly ministry and he redressed the scales of value when he died on the cross: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus".

The parable of the Good Samaritan has taught me over the past several months that I can either choose to act and speak like Jesus to bring about a new narrative, a more beautiful and eternal narrative of Godly equity; or I can, like the young man in this narrative, walk away and silence the struggle of human equity and salvation.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H41f6v91G6o>

A DOSE OF HUMILITY REQUIRED

In 2013 three black women started #Black Lives Matter (BLM). These women demonstrated radical love for their communities when it was not popular to do so. Queer women, feminists, and others stood up for Black men and women who had been brutally murdered by the police and white supremacist civilians. In 2016 Colin Kaepernick, a mixed heritage, tattoo-covered, giant afro-wearing quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, took a knee during the US national anthem to protest the same issues that stoked the women of BLM into action. He demonstrated radical love and commitment to Black communities when it was not popular to do so. His stand cost him his job. He was condemned by the President of the United States and was boycotted by all the teams of the National Football League (NFL).

Fast forward to 2020. In the wake of George Floyd's brutal murder by the police, BLM has global prominence, and everyone, from global corporations, politicians, the sports, arts and entertainment industries, proclaim that Black Lives Matter. Even the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the 'special denomination' with its 'truth' for the last days, found it necessary, from its world headquarters, area divisions, and local unions and conferences, to issue apologies and statements of various kinds, recognising that Black lives indeed do matter! How is it that a church that was formally organised in the United States in 1863, in the midst of a civil war fought in part over the burning issue of the liberation of Black lives from enslavement, is only now drawing the conclusion that Black Lives Matter?

I would humbly suggest that on the issue of racism, and on most of the key questions related to equality,

human rights and dignity in the 20th and 21st centuries, the Church has been wrong. Groups of people and organisations that it has demonized — from marginalised racial and ethnic minorities, to gays and lesbians, to feminists, to other denominations, ecumenical bodies and governmental organisations — have shown a greater degree of love, compassion and support for the oppressed and marginalised than has the SDA Church. In most cases, these groups have acted first and we have trailed in their wake. They have lived out the Christ-like attributes of love, mercy and justice, whilst the Church has displayed an out-of-touch narrow mindedness.

A powerful example of this is the Church's neglect of the commandments, whilst claiming it is the only church that keeps all the commandments! 'Love your neighbour as yourself' is the second great commandment, but the SDA church does not mention it in its fundamental doctrines. 'Love your neighbour as yourself' is a central tenet of what it means to be a Christian, yet it is not a precondition for SDA church membership. Loving your neighbour as yourself shows us the character of God, but it is a minor, almost irrelevant consideration of what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist.

The emphasis that the SDA Church has placed on claims of 'truth' at the expense of love is why it has been so negligent in addressing racial injustice. A church that loves would be quick to speak out on issues that hurt its community. A church that loves would open its doors and share its resources willingly with those in need, even at its own expense and hurt. A church that loves stands in the gap for those that are unloved.



DR WILLIAM ACKAH

Senior Lecturer and Programme Director in Community Development and Public Policy Birkbeck, University of London and Chair of the Transatlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race.

It is not too late for the Church to recognise its errors and to make restitution to those that it has for too long neglected. Here are a few starters:

To every local church in the UK (Black-led, White, Multi-ethnic, Majority-ethnic), take a break from inviting preachers from overseas. Use the money to support local anti-racist charities and Black-led community organisations. Talk to other denominations, faith groups and the local authority and work with them to support the Black community in your area.

Local churches, come together and support Black businesses. Use the same supplier for your flowers, paper, computers, cleaning supplies, repairs etc; work together and join with other denominations and create local consortia to support jobs and create opportunities in your communities.

To the Conferences and Union, scrap camp meetings or, at a minimum, extend its hiatus and use the money to sponsor non-Adventist inner city youth to attend the best Adventist Schools. Use your influence to ensure all SDA institutions that are resident in the UK are diverse and are creating pathways and opportunities for marginalised communities.

Open up the radio station and Church publications to the wider Black community. Allow them to share their knowledge, their expertise and their experiences with us. Let's expose ourselves to each other so that all can grow and develop together.

It is a radical moment; the Holy Spirit is speaking through the rocks to the Church. Engage, listen, learn, share and love. Don't let this harvest pass.

THE POLICING OF BAME COMMUNITIES IN ENGLAND



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr said: "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"!

For the majority of 2020, most of the world was confined to living with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and many are left to mourn the loss of loved ones. However, on the 25 May 2020, the untimely death of 46-year-old George Floyd, an African American killed by Derek Chauvin, a white police officer in Minneapolis, sent shockwaves of horror and disbelief around the globe. But how has this global response to the death of George Floyd impacted my own perspective on racial injustice in the UK? For me it's simply a case of déjà vu!

Having served eleven years as a police officer in the West Midlands during the 1980's, I have unique, first-hand experience of police injustice in the form of overt abuse of power against both Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and white members of the community; and the adverse impact of police misconduct on these citizens, manifesting in mistrust of the police. Most times, my presence was a deterrent for colleagues on the verge of exceeding their powers. I witnessed a community oppressed by those employed to protect them and a police service feeling under siege. How was this going to end; and who would be the brokers of peace?

In April 1993, the murder of Stephen Lawrence in an unprovoked attack took community relations and policing in London to an all-time low. This was exacerbated by the gross mishandling of the police investigations into Stephen's murder at the hands of five white racist young men. It took a change in legislation, following a public inquiry, and nineteen years to convict two of the five suspects.

From 2000 to 2010 police and community relations improved significantly. Central and local government made considerable efforts to address racial inequality by focusing on diversity and inclusion in

workplace practices in the public and private sectors.

I was headhunted to join the new (now independent) Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) which is responsible for investigating serious complaints against the police. I dealt primarily with deaths in police custody, ranging from fatal police shootings to deaths from police restraints — all tragic cases. In each case we asked the police: Could death have been avoided? What might have been done differently? How good was the intelligence that led to pursuit of individuals? And, what lessons have the police learned, particularly when operations do not go according to plan? I feel despondent that we have been here too many times before. Police community relations improve for a short while, then it takes a further tragedy to stimulate the same conversations about the need for change, to do more to empower BAME communities or to address issues of conscious and unconscious bias.

As Chair of the Home Office Trust and Public Confidence Committee, I contributed to the national agenda aimed at rebuilding trust between the police service and Britain's BAME communities. One of our major tasks was the design and rollout of a comprehensive diversity training package for police officers. Similar training was developed for other parts of the criminal justice system. But, regrettably, I have not seen sufficient change, because unacceptable behaviours and attitudes remain unchecked and, ultimately, unchallenged.

I believe my sound Christian roots enabled me to navigate some highly charged and sensitive negotiations between the police, families mourning the loss of loved ones at the hands of the state, their legal representatives and community activists.

We recently saw the humiliation of Bianca Williams, a member of Team GB and Commonwealth gold medallist, who was subjected to a hostile stop and search with her partner and three-month-old baby in the car. The Metropolitan Police have since apologised. At the time of writing

this article, 48-year-old Marcus Coutain, a black male, was filmed handcuffed to the ground, restrained by two Metropolitan police officers, one of whom appeared to have his knee on Marcus' neck, while Marcus called out, "Get off my neck!" It was yet another familiar case, mirroring the tragic fatality that galvanized the BLM movement and further evidence that real sustained change has yet to come.

Deaths in custody of people from BAME communities, particularly young black men, resonate with the black communities' experience of systemic racism; and it reflects wider concerns about discriminatory over-policing, stop and search, and criminalisation. This is indicative evidence that Institutional Racism (defined as "the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin"), identified in Sir William MacPherson's report into the death of Stephen Lawrence, strongly exists today.

Shortly after becoming Prime Minister, Theresa May said: "if you're black, you're treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you're white". It is therefore imperative for all elements of our criminal justice system to revisit their treatment of BAME communities and ensure they are all treated fairly.

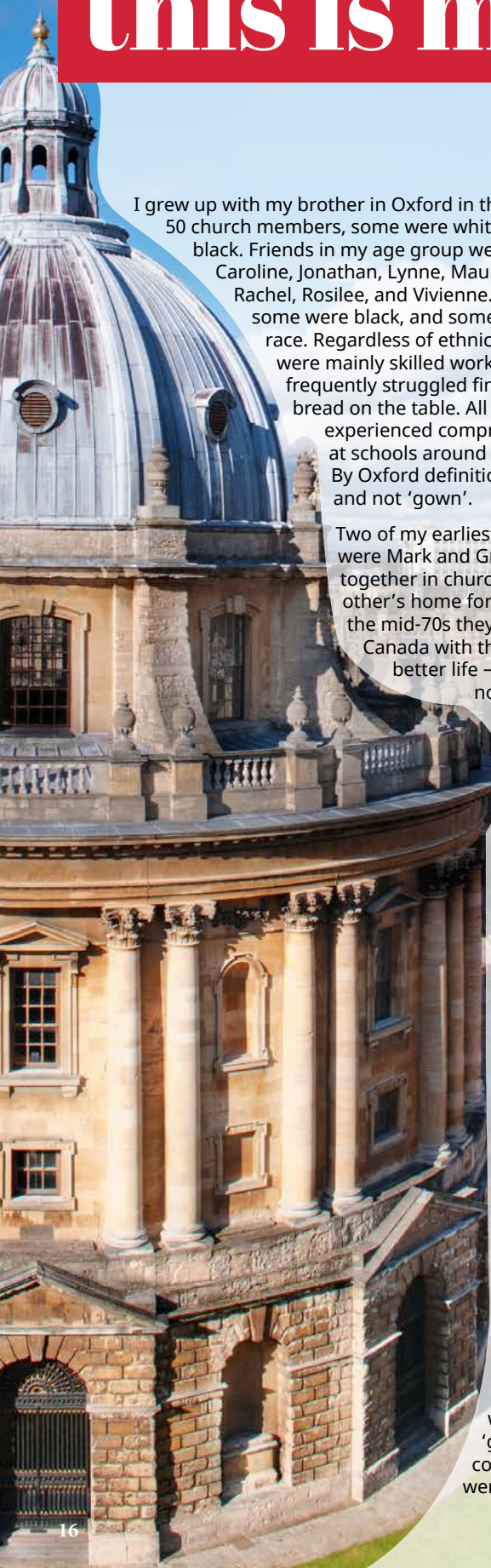
I believe that those responsible for any death in custody must be held to account. Failure to do so will lead to the erosion of public confidence in the effectiveness of our criminal justice system.



JUDY CLEMENTS OBE

SEC Children's Ministries Director

ROOTED IN THE SEC this is my story



I grew up with my brother in Oxford in the 1970s. Of the 50 church members, some were white and some were black. Friends in my age group were Adele, Barbara, Caroline, Jonathan, Lynne, Maureen, Norma, Rachel, Rosilee, and Vivienne. Some were white, some were black, and some were of mixed race. Regardless of ethnicity, our parents were mainly skilled working class, but they frequently struggled financially to put bread on the table. All but two of the group experienced comprehensive education at schools around the city and county. By Oxford definition we were 'town' and not 'gown'.

Two of my earliest Caribbean friends were Mark and Gregory. We sat together in church and visited each other's home for Sabbath lunch. By the mid-70s they had emigrated to Canada with their parents for a better life – Britain clearly was not the promised land.

Our dedicated Sabbath School teacher lovingly put the fear of God into us. A former missionary teacher to Solusi Mission (Rhodesia), and one-time Newbold preceptress, she taught with excellence. If we'd failed to learn our memory verse, our parents were quickly informed. By the next Sabbath, our memory performed better! Her husband was the church elder, a former Newbold history teacher and renowned for his interesting sermons. By Oxford definition, they were 'gown'.

But whether we were 'town' or 'gown', there was a common identity that went much deeper than

race. We truly loved each other and were there for each other. Our identity and common bond in Christ and the church was strong. Ethnic difference did not seem important. But, as I reflect, I'm distressed that I do not remember the personal racial struggles of some of my friends. Did they not share them, or was I not listening?

My brother and I attended a large monocultural village school of 1,300 pupils just north of Oxford. We were the only Adventists, and I felt alone. I longed for Sabbath at church to be with friends – the safe place. For sure, some of my friends were different: but our parents, our Sabbath School teacher, and our pastor taught us that to identify and judge another by skin colour was sinful. It was a value later reinforced by the first black SEC president, Pastor Silburn Reid, who would eloquently and frequently repeat to all, 'I am colour-blind!'

There was awareness of racial tensions within the wider South England Conference. From our Oxford perspective, there were stirrings in London and elsewhere. The Messenger informed us of the 'Pierson Package' arrangements (an attempt to resolve racial disparity in church leadership). It was a sobering Sabbath afternoon meeting in 1976 when local church members – our church family – met together to consider the merits or otherwise of a regional conference within the British Union. When the Union-wide ballot was held, the idea was rejected by an overwhelming majority.

To church leaders, along with our parents, we were deferential, with the local pastor held in high regard. A visit from a Conference official or department director was a high day! But the visit of the youth director to particularly minister to us was treasured! Each summer we'd join children and teens from across South England at the Oxwich summer camp in South Wales. For me, summer camps were heaven on earth! We played, worshipped, ate, and explored together – living under canvas. A diverse group we were, naturally learning about the experience of each other.

Local church life was, at times, a mix of contradictory worldviews. Fundamentalism was engrained in our DNA, providing strong faith and spirituality. At the same time, our worldview expanded as we enjoyed the company of Adventist postgraduate students from the US and Australia, pursuing PhDs. Their presence helped us learn to ask questions, greatly encouraged by our own Afro-Caribbean youth leader, Don Galloway.

Don loved singing and formed the Oxford Youth Choir, one which took us on an adventure – into London – and to the newly opened John Loughborough School. The SEC decided to hold a Conference-wide choir competition. We practised, we sang, but win we did not! This felt like a new journey, gaining an insight for the first time into what London church life was like. As my adventures into London became more frequent, I particularly remember a day of fellowship circa 1978/1979 at the Westminster Central Hall, with Dr Calvin Rock from Oakwood College. Dr Rock preached with authority and conviction, and the Holloway Male Voice Choir lifted the roof with their singing. Of the 2,000-strong congregation, only a smattering of white members were present. As I looked around Central Hall, this mid-teen youth began to notice difference. No longer was it 'some were white and some were black'; rather, 'most were black and some were white'. My world was changing.



DAVID NEAL

David Neal serves as the Editor of Messenger and Focus magazines, published by The Stanborough Press

FINDING A COMMON GROUND BY FORGIVING



DR CHIDI NGWABA

SEC Health Ministries Director

The United Kingdom, the United States, the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union- When we wish to project strength, harmony, and stability, we often seek out the adjective "United". It sends a message to the world that "We are together!" Football teams such as Manchester, Newcastle and Leeds are United. There has never been a successful team in history that calls itself "Divided". We are used to hearing that "Unity is strength." Jesus Himself states that: "...A house divided against itself cannot stand."

With such a heavy premium being put on unity, it is surprising how rapidly the world is racing towards disunity, division, and distrust. Generational divide, socioeconomic divisions and, of course, racial tensions, have never been more obvious. There seems to be, bubbling under the surface, a great deal of resentment and frustration- things that cannot be said in the open, lest they cause offence. These thoughts and feelings come from a genuine heartfelt place; they occupy much of our thinking time. They are fed by memories of injustices of the past and present. Fears for the future, and for future generations, also contribute to this internal tension that many of us experience.

When George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, much of the internal resentment which was contained and under control, spilled over into outright anger and rage. The rage was not just demonstrated in Minneapolis, or America, but worldwide. It was like a shaken bottle of lemonade had been opened, and none of us could escape the splash. All over the world, Black people have been making their voices heard. They have been speaking, they have been marching, they have been protesting. "Black lives matter!" has been the cry that has encircled the globe. Celebrities and politicians have also got involved, demonstrating their sympathy and support.

But, as the crowds fade and the placards are thrown away, what now? What can we do to make a permanent difference? Many organisations, businesses and institutions are reflecting on what they can do to make a difference. Many White people are searching their souls in an attempt to clear out any prejudice or racial bias. This is very useful. This time of reflection may produce some good fruit. But if we really want permanent change then, in this time of racial tension, I, as a black man, need to take a painful look at myself too. What do I seek? Do I want retribution? Do I seek payback? Or do I want peace and unity? The latter cannot exist with the former two. As painful as it may sound, I must take up the mantle of being a Peacemaker because I'm a child of God. Even though I may have been the victim of racism, Jesus asked me to love those who hate me. Even as I'm writing this, it does not sit easily with me. In fact, it is one of the most difficult things to do. Now, this does not mean appeasement. We are not supposed to condone wrongdoing. Yes, there needs to be a time of truth and reconciliation. Rather than holding resentment in, let everybody speak their truth from their lived experience. But let it be done in a spirit of love and forgiveness. Perhaps that can lead to true understanding. Maybe we can find that common ground of that binds us together. I believe that common ground exists at the foot of the cross, where we see Jesus say: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"; and, "Love one another as I have loved you"; and, "...that they may be one...that the world will know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

We have an opportunity to show the world who Jesus really is. It is not easy, and it doesn't come without sacrifice. The kingdom of God needs to be fought for, not with weapons but with love.



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THE DNA OF THE CHURCH

Certain patterns of behaviour are universal. Global patterns within the Seventh-day Adventist Church may be observed at Conference, Union and even GC Sessions. When advertised in advance that a specific business session will deal with constitutions and policies, there are significantly fewer attendees than for other meetings. Of those who do attend, although there are a few who are passionately engaged, the majority are more concerned with their technology or sleeping with their eyes wide open. Disrespect is congenital in much of life.

Many will argue that policies are dry formalities which have no impact on what we do and our mission. We need to evangelise, spread the gospel and preach the message. Policies are irrelevant! Wrong! Church policies are the collective expression of how the world-wide Church interprets biblical principles in today's complex world. They are the DNA of the Church and must be followed.

Over the last month, many justifiable questions have been asked regarding the Church's position on racism. The Church's zero tolerance towards racism is reflected in its key documents which specifically address this issue.

Fundamental Belief 14, Unity in the Body of Christ, points out: "In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation."¹

Periodically, the Church releases Statements summarising its position on important matters. In 1985 the Church issued a Statement against racism in the context of apartheid². In 1995 the GC Session approved a second Statement. Both were unequivocal in their condemnation.³

Working Policy sets out the principles of how we work as a world organisation. Policies are dynamic and may be annually updated during the GC Annual Council. The relevant policy is BA60 05, which states:

Seventh-day Adventists believe in the universal fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and are dedicated to the proclamation of the message

¹ The full Fundamental belief may be accessed at <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental-beliefs/> Note previously Fundamental Belief 14 was Fundamental Belief 13 and is referred to as such in the Statements referred to below.

² The full Statement may be accessed at: <https://www.adventist.org/articles/racism/>

³ The full Statement may be accessed at: <https://www.adventist.org/articles/human-relations/>

of Revelation 14:6-12 to all peoples of the earth. This philosophy and its resultant course of action has made the Church multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and gender inclusive...

The Church rejects any system or philosophy which discriminates against anyone on the basis of race, colour, or gender. The Church bases its position on principles clearly enunciated in the Bible, the writings of Ellen G White, and the official pronouncements of the General Conference.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

"Christ came to this earth with a message of mercy and forgiveness. He laid the foundation for a religion by which Jew and Gentile, black and white, free and bond, are linked together in one common brotherhood, recognised as equal in the sight of God. The Saviour has a boundless love for every human being. In each one He sees capacity for improvement. With divine energy and hope He greets those for whom He has given His life. In His strength they can live a life rich in good works, filled with the power of the Spirit" (7T 225).

"No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste is recognised by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God... In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. All are brought nigh by His precious blood" (COL 386).

Each of these documents express in different ways the value God places on every person. It is our responsibility, collectively and individually, to practice these principles. Violations must be recognised, and appropriate actions taken.



AUDREY ANDERSSON

Executive Secretary of the Trans-European Division.

RETHINKING OUR STRUCTURES?

To best answer the question, 'Do we need to rethink our structure?' it is important to establish what our structure actually is and how it came about.

I was baptised August, 1978, by the late Pastor George Roper, where I was voted into the membership of the Bodnant Avenue, Seventh-day Adventist Church in Leicester. At this point I became a part of the structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as it starts with (1) the local congregation.

Every Seventh-day Adventist church will have its status conferred upon them when they are voted to be a part of a sisterhood of churches known as (2) the conference.

Conferences and missions will have had their status conferred at some point in time when they were voted to be a part of (3) a union.

A union will have had its status conferred at some point in time when they were voted to be a part of (4) the General Conference.

For those who believe that I have omitted the divisions, I have not. The General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has divided the overseeing of its global work across 13 divisions. So, in our SEC context, we are a part of the Trans European Division of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The division is the General Conference in our territory.

To this 4-point structure (1) Local Church (2) Conference (3) Union (4) General Conference, we might note that the names/terms we apply to our structure do not find their origin in scripture. Many of the terms we use around our structure were first used by founders of the Methodist movement which predates us, for example, 'conference', 'general conference' and 'presidents'.

It is also worthy of note that for Methodists, which, we might remember, was a reform movement of the Anglican Church, their move towards organization was for them a way to beat the devil (<https://www.seedbed.com/john-wesley-organized-to-beat-the-devil/>).

I mention this because the Seventh-day

Adventist Church, in our struggle to develop an organisational structure, was not about a way to beat the devil, but very much to assist with our mission. In our most current incarnation, the wording of our mission is, "Make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels' Messages in preparation for His soon return (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, Rev 14:6-12)" (<https://www.adventist.org/articles/mission-statement-of-the-seventh-day-adventist-church/>)

Our name not only includes beliefs important to us but is our mission to share with the world, the largely neglected Biblical truth of the seventh-day Sabbath and the soon second coming of Christ.

Historically, our church structure was to facilitate and enhance our missional purpose.

For the first 4 decades, the church structure was (1) local church (2) conference (3) General Conference.

Prior to 1901 when unions were formed, the General Conference oversaw the work across the globe but also had a close involvement in conference affairs and decision-making as it involved mission strategies.

This presented a number of difficulties. For example, with the General Conference being located in Battle Creek, USA, directing affairs across the globe from there was not time efficient, with letters taking many weeks to reach recipients across the globe. In addition, General Conference officers might not have been particularly sensitive or cognisant of the local issues where they were directing the work. The formation of unions in 1901 was to allow greater speed and contextualising of mission initiatives.

So, in part we have our current structure so that our mission could be better suited for local conditions.

Additionally, the structure was seeking to avoid kingly power. At the 1901 General Conference Session, Ellen White stated that "God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line. . . . If the work had not been so restricted by an impediment here, and an impediment there, and on the other side an impediment, it would have gone forward in its majesty."¹⁸ The point here is not simply of "kingly power" but of how it hindered the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

unions and conferences were autonomous and could do what they believed would best advance the work of God in their fields. People on the ground are best able to decide how to facilitate mission in their areas. The church structure was to assist missional purposes.

Do we need to rethink our structures? Yes, so long as the rethinking is based upon making our mission more effective.

Additionally, this question needs to be asked at all 4 levels of our church structure although this comes with risks.

Ellen White believed that local people became strong leaders by praying and studying ministry issues together, agreeing on a plan, and acting together in faith. She recognized that they would make mistakes but believed that humbly fixing those mistakes would strengthen both faith and leadership skills."



IAN SWEENEY

President, British Union Conference.

Breathe



Summertime is my favourite season of the year. I love walking, and it's a great time to be out and about, hearing the birds sing, watching bees pollinate flowers and taking time to admire garden roses in full bloom.

Awesome!

But I also love to go for walks so that I can breathe in the fresh air. According to research, fresh air helps to disinfect your lungs and reinforces your immune system. To be able to freely inhale and exhale is a God-given gift since Creation. We are told in the book of Genesis that, 'God breathed into Adam the breath of life and he became a living soul'.

But what happens when that Divine life-giving act is compromised or contaminated? What happens when it is stealthily taken away by COVID-19? Or brutally removed by a police-chokehold? Or slowly sucked out of those who have travelled hundreds of miles in search of a better life, only to drown at sea?

I'm not talking fiction here. This is the reality of the world in 2020, a world that suffers from gross inequalities, daily abuses and systemic injustice.

Jesus was a breath of fresh air when he entered the scene 2000 years ago. He introduced himself, not by a title, but by His mission. In Luke 4:18 (ESV), He states, 'The Spirit of

the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Like our Lord, ADRA seeks to be a breath of fresh air in a world where people are struggling to breathe. The effects of COVID-19 not only caused physical distress to those who experienced it, but it has and will cause economic breathlessness for many worldwide. In the UK, through working with 73 hubs during the pandemic, we have been able to feed the hungry, supply PPE for those on the frontlines in hospitals and provide psycho-social care to the vulnerable and the lonely. But, the fallout from the contagion is far from over. As the UK opens up again, the economic situation will become clearer, and the demand on food banks and charitable services will increase. ADRA will be at the forefront, breathing life into the communities infected with economic despair.

Racial justice is currently the 'hot potato' on everyone's lips and rightly so. Each of us is equal in the eyes of the Creator; and each of us has a responsibility to our brothers and sisters, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, age or status. Embedded in ADRA's principles are justice, compassion and love for all. But talking about racial justice without solutions is simply adding another voice to a

very big conversation. ADRA is an action-orientated organisation, and one of the ways in which we have tackled racial injustice is to work with BAME people living with HIV/Aids during the pandemic. We are also a delivery partner in a project with a large mental health charity in the UK, to provide support to BAME women who are isolated, excluded or abused. And our I AM Urban team are working on a joint initiative with our Programme Team around racial justice, education and health inequalities. ADRA is taking a leading role to inhale solidarity and exhale unity while they address racial injustice in the UK and abroad.

For many the phrase, 'refugee', is a dirty word. It has been politicised over the years to push nationalist agendas throughout the world. But let me give you a little insight into its true meaning. 'A refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution or natural disaster'. Last year, we asked you to support ADRA's work with the Rohingya refugees and thank you so much to those who gave for our work in these camps. However, there are those refugees who were unable to be housed, and they have attempted to seek asylum in Malaysia. Currently, 300 of them are stranded at sea, and many of these will drown on their way to a better life. ADRA, as a network, continues to breathe hope into the lives of thousands of people who are displaced around the world.

After the flood, God breathed life back into the world. After days of flooding and the devastation that only water can bring, Noah sent out a dove. On the dove's first trip, she returned empty-handed. On her second journey, she returned with an olive leaf in her mouth, breathing hope into the eight people who had survived. New life was springing up – the days of being in lockdown were coming to an end.

ADRA is excited about the hope that we can see on the horizon and we would love you to be a part of our breathing exercise. For us to effectively continue to breathe life into the 73 hubs we are assisting, our work for racial justice and support for the most marginalised peoples in the world, we need some financial breathing apparatus which you can help to provide.

You can support our work with a single donation of £10.00, as a financial inhaler. This will help to provide 5 vulnerable people with a hot meal in one of our hubs in the UK or feed a family of 6 for 3 days in Myanmar.

But you can also support with financial oxygen and donate either £25.00 or £35.00. Twenty-five pounds will provide a wellness kit for 5 homeless people or provide essential PPE for 5 volunteers for two weeks here in the UK. Overseas, £25.00 can provide a family in Ghana with hygiene kits and safe water. Your gift of 35.00 will provide weekly shopping for a low-income family living in the UK. In Yemen, the same amount will provide a staple food package for a family with malnourished children for a month.

Lastly, you can support us with a financial ventilator as a lifeline for our work by donating either £50 or £100. Fifty pounds used in the UK will restock a food pantry/food bank with essential supplies. In Sri Lanka, it will provide a hand-washing station to keep COVID-19 at bay. And, £100 will help to run a food kitchen here for two weeks, while in South Sudan, it can install hand washing facilities in community centres.

You can support our Appeal by donating at www.adra.org./donate.

Help us to breathe. Help us to help others to breathe. Help us to bring hope and restoration to a world that is suffocating under the strain of poverty, inequality and injustice.

Thank you.

ADRA is excited about the hope that we can see on the horizon and we would love you to be a part of our breathing exercise.

You can support our Appeal by donating at www.adra.org/donate

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S CARE (ICC): Ricardo's Story



WHO ARE ICC? International Children's Care (ICC) is a private relief and development organisation. As an all-inclusive care provider, our mission is to enhance life-preparation for orphaned and vulnerable children in developing countries. With 7 projects around the world from Ghana to Mexico, we nurture the potential of children who become a part of "our family". We promote their mental, physical and emotional well-being by providing comprehensive care for them in families within children's villages that we develop, support and supervise. We are proud to share with you Ricardo's story!

Who is Ricardo?

Ricardo's story at ICC begins when, at just 4 years old, he arrived at "El Oasis" Children's Village in Valle de la Trinidad, Baja California, Mexico.

El Oasis is a project founded and operated by International Children's Care (ICC), and Ricardo and his two younger brothers arrived when the very first kids came to El Oasis, brought by DIF — the Mexican Social Services Department — in December 1997.



Ricardo was 4, Christian was 3 and Manuel was only 2 years old. As the oldest brother, Ricardo used to be a good leader, looking after his siblings and always eager to learn new things. Since very little, he showed the attributes of a champion: patience, persistence, good attitude, resilience, cheerfulness and interest in learning more about Jesus and the new life He promised to give us.

Ricardo always showed an interest in getting good grades in school. He loved music and became a member of El Oasis Children's Choir when he was only 6 years old. When he was 10 years old, he was already in charge of operating the PA system of the local church.

When he was around 8 years old, El Oasis received a donation of several computers, bought in brand new parts to be assembled by Daniel, the Development Director who was also the IT person on campus.

He invited Ricardo and 3 other kids to help and to learn how to assemble a computer from scratch. The kids did a great job and, days later, the computer lab was fully functional.

A couple of weeks later, Daniel received a call from the principal of the elementary school where

Ricardo and the other kids from El Oasis attended. The principal wanted to ask Daniel to talk with Ricardo, because the computers teacher was complaining about Ricardo's recent change of attitude in class. She said that when she asked Ricardo to work in class, he laid back on his desk and asked her, "Teacher, have you ever built a computer before?" Her answer was, "Well, not really, why?"

Ricardo said, "Well, let me tell you that I have done that. So, I



don't think I need to work in class, since I already know more than you." So, after a little talk between Ricardo and Daniel, things were put straight and Ricardo was a helpful and cooperative student in the computers class again.

Ricardo graduated from elementary school, then middle school and finally from high school. With good grades and many friends, he showed his willingness to work hard and to learn with respect from all his teachers. After finishing high school, Ricardo worked for one year for his personal development, to build some life experience and to decide which path to take in



university. He entered the dental school of Montemorelos University. The road wasn't easy, but he was completely sure he wanted to take the opportunity to be someone in life, someone with a medical purpose to help people in need.

When Ricardo was doing his practice in the school clinic, very often patients would say, "I would like to wait for Dr. Ricardo." He was well known for having a great attitude with the patients. He showed his real care for them, not only in regard to their medical needs, but making sure he could leave in their hearts the seed of hope and happiness, to see life the way he sees it, always with the glass "half-full" instead of "half-empty". But they also knew Ricardo's dental work was very good and professional. The school medical brigades were the perfect opportunity for him to give back, helping the most disadvantaged people.

In May 2020, although the pandemic situation of COVID-19 cancelled all big events - including graduations - Montemorelos University had a virtual graduation for their graduate students, delivering more than 300 degrees — including bachelor, master and doctoral degrees. Ricardo was one of them, and our hearts were so excited, although we couldn't celebrate as expected. To our surprise, Ricardo's graduation photography was shown on the university's main Facebook page, though the graduation weekend. What a wonderful surprise!

On the last day of July, Ricardo will be finishing a 12-month social service required for all graduated students from medical areas. He is so thankful

for the amazing support that the family of ICC has given to him. He considers himself so blessed to be part of the El Oasis family. He knows that without the support of donors and faithful supporters, his destiny would be totally different in this world.

We are so proud of Ricardo and his achievements in life, the good dentist he is, always looking to find ways to help others! For Ricardo, this is easy; he learned from other people, since he was little, how much you can touch and change someone's life by helping the best way you can.



Now that he has graduated as a dentist, he is looking for an opportunity to take a 2-year specialty to enable him to find a better job, so that he can continue giving back and helping others in need, as he has been helped in this life.

Sometimes this means sharing your time for others, offering guidance and words of encouragement, using your resources or finding ways to raise funds, with the help of friends, to meet someone's needs.



HEROES OF HERTFORDSHIRE

(Author: June Coombs)

The 'One Vision Project', based at Stanborough Park Church, has developed a reputation for encouraging local groups to work together, sharing resources and expertise for the benefit of their local community. During 'Lockdown' the project came into its own as people worked together, forgetting their political and religious differences to help those in need during the current health crisis.

Last month, six people from 'One Vision', the umbrella name for the group of local charities in the Watford area, received a certificate awarding them 'Hero of Hertfordshire' status, signed by The Lord Lieutenant and The High Sheriff of Hertfordshire, for their selfless work for others during the current coronavirus epidemic. All are currently working voluntarily at the local hub based at the church.



Two are members of Stanborough Park Church. One is Enoch Kanagaraj, the founder and Chairman of 'One Vision', who has worked tirelessly during the outbreak to keep supplies moving to the vulnerable members of the local community. The other is Dr Steve Moser, a consultant at a central London hospital, who spends many hours preparing meals for distribution to homes in the locality.

'One Vision' will be featured at a General Conference session, where it will get a two-minute spot in the GC LEAD conference in the autumn, as an example of being the hands and feet of Jesus.

MAKING DISCIPLES, BUILDING COMMUNITIES IN NORTH LONDON

(Author: Victoria Meguille Soyam)

In 2018, an invitation came through the church doors in Edmonton to attend a conference on crime in North London, at the Edmonton Methodist Church. A group of members from Edmonton Central answered the call along with Pastor Jude Jeanville, the local pastor at the time. After the conclusion of the discussion, Pastor Jeanville struck up a conversation with the local minister, Reverend Dedji Valentin, and a friendship blossomed from there.

While they kept in touch sporadically, the pair found themselves together again at a funeral at Valentin's church, where Pastor Jeanville delivered a prayer of comfort for the family, allowing the ministers to serve side by side and strengthening their bond.

As their relationship grew, Reverend Valentin also extended an invitation to Pastor Jeanville to share a word at the Methodist Church's Men's Convention.

Despite the recent lockdown and social distancing, Pastor Jeanville and Reverend Valentin kept in touch, sharing their experiences as ministers and encouraging one another. Reverend Valentin was kind enough to extend yet another opportunity to Pastor Jeanville to



Edmonton Methodist Church Sunday Service



Edmonton Methodist Church Sunday Service speak to his congregation in June, this time over Zoom and YouTube. Inspired by the presentations at the recent Virtual Camp Meeting, Pastor Jeanville offered Dr Chidi in his place to deliver a timely message on health. Reverend Valentin accepted and invited the members of Tottenham Church, where Pastor Jeanville now serves, to join. Dr Chidi provided much-needed guidance on health, linked to biblical principles and answering questions from the congregation.

Pastor Jeanville is very excited about his continued relationship with the Reverend and members of the Methodist Church. "When we first met, I did not know what to expect," says Pastor Jeanville "but my mantra is found in the following statement from the pen of inspiration: 'The Saviour mingled with men, ministered to them, met their needs, won their confidence and then bid them follow him' (MH. P.143). As we face a world in need of God, it is vital that we are willing to follow the example of Christ, creating relationships in our communities to build a kinder, more Christ-like world while we are here."

LEWISHAM SDA HELPS OUT WITH FOOD PARCELS FOR THOSE MOST IN NEED

(Author: Natasha Wallace)

Lewisham Church is one of several ADRA Community Hubs within the South England Conference. Local residents in urgent need of assistance during the coronavirus lockdown are getting a helping hand from Lewisham Church's Community Services Team.

Since 'lockdown', they have transitioned their weekly soup kitchen into a food hub and have been organising parcels of food and other essential items for distribution to vulnerable people and families who have been struggling to access supplies or are shielding because of COVID-19.

Every Thursday, a team of volunteers, including members of the Downham SDA Church, run the food distribution from the church's community hall, packing and delivering bags of groceries to Lewisham residents. They've already provided over 450 urgently needed food parcels to people across the borough.



Each food parcel contains basics like bread and eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables, tinned beans and pulses, pasta or rice and teabags. Essentials, like toilet roll, are also included. Much of their food supply is donated by a local Sainsbury's supermarket, which the soup kitchen has established a long relationship with over the years. A member of the team organises the weekly collections. This has been the lifeline of their service.

Once packed, the food parcels are collected from the community hall or delivered to individual addresses. Anyone needing food can receive a food parcel, and referrals from church members or voluntary groups are accepted.

The Community Services leader, Natasha Wallace, has been leading the project with Head Deacon Tony Boyd. This outreach has been essential to people's daily lives.

"When we stopped running our soup kitchen due to social distancing, we knew we had to continue helping people during lockdown. The pandemic has left a lot of people struggling for the basics, and I'm pleased we're in a position to help."

"By providing vulnerable people with a one-off parcel of food and essential items to help them through a difficult patch, or by delivering food to them every single week, we hope to support them during the coronavirus lockdown and make life a little bit easier for them. We've also sent a parcel of toiletries for residents at a local nursing home."



"Obviously we're going to need a lot of food to support local people during this crisis, so we are grateful to Sainsbury's and the other food donations. At one point we had a large quantity of Easter eggs leftover from the Easter weekend. People loved having an extra chocolate treat in their food parcels!"

The food hub is run by a group of dedicated volunteers who take time out of their day to help each week.

"We've been blessed, and the support we have received is appreciated. ADRA has recently supported the food hub and this will help us continue to stay open. I think this outreach is so important. In a way, it's us reaching out and showing the love of God to people. Everyone is so thankful and say, God bless you. That makes me smile".

The pastor of Lewisham SDA church, Pastor Kwarteng-Ampofo, also helps out with the food distributions.

He said: "Sermonising in this manner is more fulfilling to me than to give a forty minutes homily on Sabbath at 11am. To be able to feed the poor and the needy is more Christ-centric. Maybe, instead of studying more Koine Greek and Hebrew in our Theological Institutions, the students should rather be taught how to serve in

the community in the format of Lewisham Community Services Department.

“I can confidently say that the organisers and the managers of this ministry in Lewisham church have done extremely well. Their dedication to the task has been commendable, and I’m extremely grateful for everything they’ve done to get this up and running so quickly.”

The team are also considering extending their services to provide hot food takeaways for the homeless and those sleeping rough.

THE PROTESTING POET (Author: Don Roberts)

On June 7th, 26-year-old Management Consultant and poet Richie Jackson, an Adventist living in Croydon, joined thousands of anti-racism protestors in London.

While attending the protest on Vauxhall Bridge, he performed a poem he wrote, entitled, ‘A Human Race Against Time’, which he later made into a short film and shared it online and with SEC Media, who then featured it on its weekly 60 SEC News broadcast.

In an online interview on July 17th, Jackson explained his decision to attend the protest and the church’s role in the global racial awakening following the police killing in America of George Floyd.

“It was actually the first time that I participated in a protest of any kind. After hearing about the death of Ahmaud Arbery, and later George Floyd,” Jackson said, “my heart felt very heavy.” He recalls phoning his mother and expressing the belief that “people in London should come together” and show solidarity and support for the Floyd family.

“I felt that when George Floyd said the words ‘I can’t breathe’, and was ignored, it was important for the world to react in a strong way – to say we heard those words, and enough is enough to the evil that is racism. Some of my friends had also been impacted by what was going on. Some of them feel angry about what they see and may channel that emotion into something negative. I have different coping mechanisms, one is writing.”

Jackson described being in a “creative flow” while writing ‘A Human Race Against Time’.

“Just to be able to release some of those negative emotions into something positive was very therapeutic. When I finished the poem, I got down on my knees and I prayed and thanked God. I really felt like He was inspiring me while I was writing this piece, and therefore it had the potential to be very impactful.”

After sharing the poem with some of his friends and neighbours, he learnt of the ‘Black Lives Matter’ protest in London. “Immediately, I personally felt that I needed to be there”. It did not escape Jackson, that his actions would potentially put his life at risk.

“We’re in the middle of a COVID-19 pandemic, the natural instinct would be to not go to a large gathering; it would almost seem nonsensical. But when I think back on the

experiences that I’ve had with racism -in my life alone – yes, COVID-19 is a virus, but racism is also a virus”.

Influenced by smartly dressed civil rights protestors in 1960’s America, Jackson set off wearing a suit, with protective gloves and mask, and a badge of his late grandfather, a member of the Windrush generation. He joined protestors on Vauxhall Bridge, where he performed his poem while holding a cardboard placard with the words ‘Systemic racism cuts deep like a knife’.

“I really wanted the words on the placard to have a lot of meaning; for people to almost understand the impact of the trauma and recognise the impact racism has on a human being.”

Jackson shared that his experience at the protest was “very emotional and powerful...a bit like attending a funeral”. He remembers reflecting on black history, the stories his grandparents told of when they first came to the UK, the experiences of his parents and his own, growing up in Leicester.

“I was very fortunate to have the upbringing that I had. I was raised with an Adventist parent, my mother - a very wise woman,” he adds, smiling broadly. “Some of the experiences that we go through, as negative as they may be, when you look at them through a lens of love, you can react very differently.”

When asked about the role of the church, Jackson commented, “It’s very important that the church has a voice, that it speaks about these important issues, because there is always a Godly narrative – a Christian and Adventist perspective that we need to be sharing. It’s important that no matter how you choose to speak about the issue, you do speak in some way.”

Jackson mentioned that in the past, “there’s been a lot of silence on the subject of racism;” but he commended the pastors who have been speaking out, adding, “I feel a lot of the actions of the church are still to come.” Quoting from his poem he states, “When we listen, we hear. When we change, we care.” Jackson explains: “There’s a time for listening, but in terms of what we do, how we choose to change, that shows how much we really care about the issue in the first place. Racism is a clock that really needs to stop.”

YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/jQgTMRjEIA>



Black Lives do Matter



Black lives DO matter Remove hatred
and see Peaceful protests and pro-activity
Black lives DO matter Discuss and talk
openly Break the chains, be set free
Black lives DO matter
Time to treat the open wound We live
under one sky, sun and moon
Black lives DO matter Not just one
month of the year Stop shedding
crocodile tears
Black lives DO matter
Educate the world population
End colour oppression for every
generation
Black lives DO matter
Injustice will always be wrong Keep on
singing that freedom song

Annice Thomas
August 2020



STAND

NUMBERS 27:1-8

Devotional

Tucked away in the twenty-seventh chapter of Numbers is a remarkable story about five women who made history. Their story begins with their father who was of the tribe of Manasseh- Zelophehad by name. We know very little about him, except that he was more than likely one of the first generation of Israelites who left Egypt. What we do know is that Zelophehad had no sons but was blessed with five daughters – Mohlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah (v1). At the time of this story, Moses recalls that Israel was on the brink of entering Canaan. Now that their father was deceased, there was no one to speak on their behalf. Consequently, Zelophehad's daughters would be excluded from any claims to their father's inheritance, simply because a father's property/ inheritance was passed from father to son and not father to daughter.

Although Zelophehad's daughters knew this, they decided to speak up anyway. With the exception of Miriam, no woman had ever done anything like this before. This was totally unprecedented. Driven by a need for fairness and by their faith in God to hear their claims, they approached Moses and challenged the status quo. Standing before Moses and the leaders of Israel, they said, "Our father died in the wilderness.... Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father" (vs 3-4).

I would like to think that Moses saw their heart that day, that he was prepared to grant them their request. First, it was important for Moses to approach the Lord on the matter (v5). The Lord agreed that Zelophehad's daughters should receive their father's inheritance (v7).

In today's climate of seeking fairness for all, I wonder, are we prepared to make a stand for justice and fairness like these brave women? The story concludes with the law being changed that day (v8). Zelophehad's daughters preserved their father's memory and inherited a portion of the Promised Land. I thank God for inspiring Moses to record this story of faith. It reminds us all that we have been called to change our world right where we are! I pray that the Lord will help us to live up to this reality, to be confident in our convictions and to speak up when the opportunity arises.



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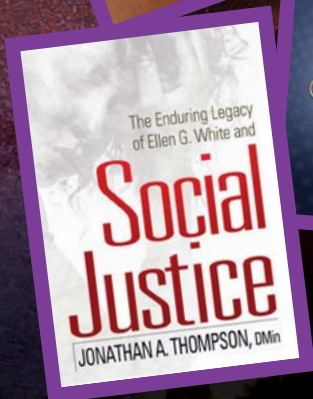
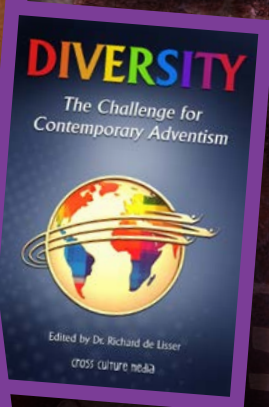
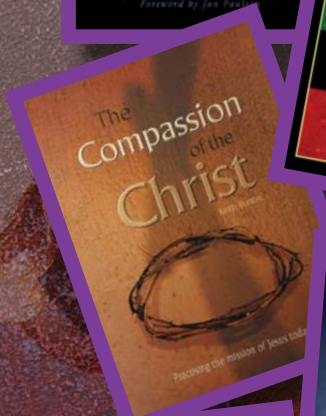
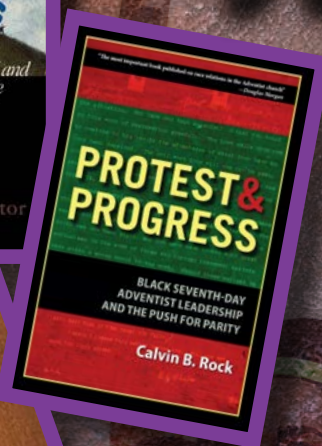
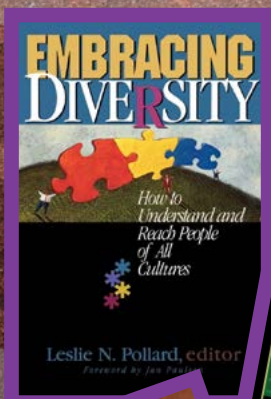
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