

WORSHIP, MUSIC, AND SPIRITUALITY

Baby Steps

I do not believe that dismantling racism within the church is possible in my lifetime; like extracting flour from a cake already baked and ingested, it would literally tear us apart. Even though I will never experience a fully anti-racist church, I know that having one is possible and necessary for our collective liberation, which is why I choose to work toward it. For the sake of the integrity of my ministry, for the sake of those who have come before me and those who will come after me, and for the sake of the gospel, I must do all I can to build a church that is anti-racist (and anti-oppression). I am strengthened by the words of Paul, who reminds us that in order for something to grow within a seed, something else in that same seed must die. So perhaps, if we are to grow into an anti-racist church (as the kin-dom of God is), we very practically need to allow some things to die. I am starting with myths that I believe must die in order for us to grow into the way that God dreams for us. What are you starting with?

Myth	Examples in church life	Why it is problematic
Canada is a “promised land”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on the Underground Railroad in worship services and liturgies • Using triumphalist and congratulatory language in worship when discussing equity and equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It allows us to avoid talking about slavery in Canada and neglect the history of the Underground Railroad that travelled south to Mexico
Being “better than” is good enough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on statistics and human rights violations in other parts of the world while avoiding examples from Canada • Implying that some forms of racism are less harmful than others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It allows us to water down the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of freedom fighters and civil rights activists • It ignores the status and well-being of racialized and Indigenous people in Canada (e.g., by not collecting data)
Avoiding conflict demonstrates civility or indicates success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding language that might make White people uncomfortable, including naming racism • Avoiding conversations about racism • Only asking for feedback from racialized people in controlled spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White power and privilege goes unchecked • The goal becomes “looking diverse” instead of being inclusive • It allows for cultural appropriation
Transforming hearts is the key to dismantling racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on positive intentions over outcomes • Denouncing overt acts of hate by hateful people while denying or excusing micro-aggressions within our congregations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halts further steps toward dismantling racism • Associates racism with extremism while denying everyday privileges of Whiteness • Supports the notion that racism is primarily personal and not also structural and systemic

Perhaps if these myths die, the seed of the kin-dom, the real commonwealth of God, will have the opportunity to grow so that everyone has the right and opportunity to enjoy life to its fullest. For all our sakes, may it be so.

With love,
Alydia

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