



2022  
LENT SERIES

AUTHENTIC  
DIVERSITY &  
JUSTICE  
WORKING  
GROUP

## STRUGGLING WITH WHITE PRIVILEGE AND FOLLOWING JESUS

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*"Train a child in the right way, and when old, they will not stray."* Proverbs 22:6

When I was 5 or 6 years old, I had a racially charged experience that left an imprint on me for life. In the mountains near the rural village in which I grew up, was a small community of black families. This community was about 13 miles just north of the Mason Dixon Line in central Pennsylvania. The black residents were the descendants of persons who had escaped their "slave owners" and some who came north after the Emancipation Proclamation. Both groups were so grateful to have crossed into a "free state" that they simply settled (and hid) there just over the line. My father was friends with people in this black settlement and one day he invited a man there to come to our church. This was a Lutheran congregation. Our family had been Lutheran since they left Germany in the late 1600s and landed in central PA. The next Sunday, the black friend of my father came to our church. When he began to ascend the long steps outside the front door, the president of the congregation, a prominent, wealthy, white businessman stepped to the open double doors, extended his arms out to the door jams, towering over the man, announced to the visitor that he was not welcome, and advised him "to go to [his] own church." Ironically, all of this took place in the shadow of the Gettysburg battlefield less than 20 miles away and directly on the path General Lee's army had marched to and retreated from Gettysburg.

My father was embarrassed and infuriated, but the deed was done. Father was not actually at the door at the strategic moment. The reverberations, the explosive aftermath, the lengthy discussions in our home, the drama, the raw feelings, and the sides that took shape for and against left an impression on me that I can feel almost viscerally yet today. Make no mistake, our children are watching, and they understand more at a younger age than many suppose. As shameful as the incident was and as indicative of how deeply racism and white supremacy can be rooted - even in the church, I am grateful for what I learned from it. It became part of a life-long set of values.

Perhaps a valuable exercise for this season of Lent might be to find a child, grandchild, other relative or special child with whom to have a conversation, possibly an ongoing conversation, about race at an age-appropriate level. Remember, our youth are watching and listening - always watching, listening and learning. Racism is learned.

Let us pray: Gracious creator of all in your own likeness, we ask your forgiveness of our tendency to judge others and our failure to love all our neighbors as ourselves. Guide us in our child rearing and strengthen us in our desire and our efforts to work for social, economic and racial justice. Amen.