

AMR Annual Convocation...

How did we choose this theme and where are we going with it?

From David McGettigan, AMR Dean:

When the AMR Council and Convo Planning Team rightly decided that we must go virtual this year rather than face-to-face, clearly our long-planned topic **“Worship”** needed to be postponed until 2021 when, with God’s help, we will be together again. But what to do right now?

I suggested a theme which was weighing heavily, I sensed, on all our hearts – the horrible divisions among us, particularly racial, their authentic roots, the complicity of the Church of Jesus Christ across racial lines in bringing us to and keeping us in this sad state, our inability to be the force for unity as children of the same Creator even within Christianity, our call and our desire to do much better. All the programs, the money and the laws we have thrown at our racial divisions have had an effect, some more than others, but I believe none of us really thinks we are where God wants us to be. And the reality unfolding around us in the streets, in political rhetoric and policy, in our own deep fears testifies to that.

Why are we still in such a state about racial understanding and unity? Because programs, money and laws, for all the good they may do, fail in the critical area of need...**transformation of the heart**. And that is Jesus’ business...heart changing.

So, we the followers of Jesus ought to be about, by another way that begins with an examination of our own hearts, repentance, surrender to Christ’s way and a pledge to begin personal conversations with brother and sister Christians who are a different race from us. Many things have prevented such exchanges, but the most apparent to me is fear. Fear of transparent, open, charitable, honest conversation among even Christians of differing color and ethnic experience lest we be labeled, harassed, targeted, rejected, thought worse of than we already are by others. It is not perceived as “safe” to have deep and honest personal conversation across racial lines especially today.

Well, there is only one truly safe space to be open to a brother or sister...in Christ and in His body, the Church. We start first with ourselves and when Christ has begun to heal us, we go forth to the world with one voice, even still disagreeing about issues, but united in our authentic understanding of each other’s minds, hearts and experiences, and with the Gospel as our healing tool.

At the behest of the Council and Planning Team, I made contact with Pr. Trina Petersen, a wonderful NALC colleague and fellow Dean in the South for help. I told Trina all of the above and more of my heart and, said, “I am convinced, particularly from my 12 years pastoring in Atlantic City, replete with Black Christian Churches, Pastors and Bishops with whom I began—only began because it is slow and tedious at times—to develop healthy and loving relationships, that the only answer is when a Black person and a White person take a chance talking with honesty and charity about their real differences of mind, heart and experience. And if we are truthful with ourselves, we have to admit we have Black and White differences even in the Churches where we both confess Jesus Christ. We’ve gotta start there”.

Trina surprised me. When I finished my long confession and plea, the first thing she said to me was “Thank you!” For what? “Thank you”, she said, “for acknowledging we do have Black and White and you notice it, and it frames your attitudes and approach to others who differ in color from you because until we honestly admit we actually do see Black and White when we see another person, we will never have that transparent, loving and healing personal interaction and interchange that will move us forward.” I was a bit stunned by Trina’s unexpected initial reaction and some deep emotions welled up in me leading to tears.

With that, I want Trina to talk to you about how appropriate and important this effort is and how she might begin – notice, just begin – to help us tackle it long term.