

# Becoming a Beloved Community Gatherings

January 15 & 26, February 5 & 12, March 5, 2023

## What current strengths can we build on and leverage to become a more just and equitable community?

### *A history of engagement*

- Congregational awareness of racial justice issues in communities of faith and in the world in general—good starting point
- This is not our first conversation about this—it is ongoing (not just on MLK Day/Black History Month)
- We have been at this a long time—have been talking about systemic racism since before it was trendy
- We have stayed true to this issue over the long-term—not just jumped onto a current issue
- Racial justice team, zoom encounter groups, other initiatives to date that have helped us to look at these issues
- We have a longstanding racial justice group that has evolved over time, and that hosts various events
- Discussions we've had about different forms of racism, how that impacts us and others—good and need to keep going
- We have done work already looking at various racial justice issues (education, immigration, economic justice, etc.), as well as internal issues
- George Floyd killing was pivotal in the move towards racial justice
- The George Floyd vigil was very impactful
- Appreciate how we have prayed/taken a moment of silence when things have happened in the news—naming them and recognizing they are impactful is important

### *A willingness to have these discussions*

- Willingness to go down roads with no clear-cut answers—willingness to keep feeling our way
- We host events and places to have these conversations—even if it's messy
- We are a community that is willing to have these conversations
- Making time to listen to the community—gatherings like this—are important and make people realize their voices are valued
- Willingness to be vulnerable—to listen and to admit to not having all the answers
- Not having answers can be frustrating, but we stick with it—see it as an ongoing journey
- A safe space to engage these issues

### *A commitment tied to our vision*

- A common belief/goal that racial justice is a good thing
- Unified leadership on this issue creates momentum
- Racial justice is not just a box to check, or a statement of belief on our website, or a one-off initiative
- Racial justice is an organic part of our vision to follow Jesus—not an add-on
- Our vision to follow Jesus—this brings the challenge of who Jesus is and what he teaches—makes racial justice an integral part of who we are
- The driver for our justice work is love
- Willingness to look at our own biases and internal issues as an integral part of following Jesus
- Diversity, inclusion and equity are central to our vision of following Jesus
- We are intentional about racial justice issues—it is in our annual plan and strategic plan, it is a priority with benchmarks and milestones
- Emphasis on authenticity as a value

- Passion and conviction to be the change. A sense of responsibility
- Our focus on healing and reconciliation is a strength—a way to call out instances when people are causing harm.

#### *Intentional about racial justice*

- Intentional about making diverse representation upfront on Sundays and in leadership (the Board)
- Sunday messages are intentional about incorporating poems, quotes, songs from diverse sources
- Being intentional about telling a fuller racial and social history in the messages—and drawing on media from racially diverse sources
- We are intentional about having People of Color visible upfront on Sundays
- Messages look beyond obvious meanings and dig into social justice issues
- Pastoral team consciously teaching on racial justice and emphasizing compassion and love for one another
- Pastors and community taking an inclusive approach (racial, LGBTQ issues, etc.)
- Willingness to look at the word of God through a historical lens—having a critical eye to Scripture when it comes to inclusion
- Intentional seeking to promote diversity, equity and inclusion over the years means we do well in this area, and feel no concerns as a Person of Color, or in inviting other people
- We hired a consultant—being willing to spend money demonstrates our commitment
- We will build a reading room in the renovated farmhouse to facilitate racial justice education (using legacy funds from former member Colleen Heitkamp)
- The Black Lives Matter sign was a visible statement about what we stand for
- The racial justice-focused Little Free Library is also a good sign of the importance of this issue for our community
- We mention praying for Ukraine in the service—we can mention other things that are current issues
- Equity and addressing systemic issues should be the goal rather than diversity *per se*. But we want to address how we are together—not just externally focused

#### *A welcoming community*

- A very loving place, even if we don't have everything worked out
- We try to be sensitive and try to accommodate everyone
- Moving forward in this area will create tensions, differences, and ambiguities—and we talk about this (recognizing divergent views) in messages already
- Community that is welcoming to all—many ways to connect and engage
- Church is not too big to get lost, not too cliquey (although there are some cliques)
- Inclusivity, openness to a variety of approaches, and accessibility for non-church people in a number of areas, e.g., taking communion—so racial justice initiatives have integrity (not performative)—we are serious about engaging outside the church
- It is a church where it is very easy to invite people—it's loving, welcoming, open, feels safe; an invited African American friend said he did not feel he stood out, even though predominantly white
- Have sometimes been the only African American in the group but never felt like it because the people were so loving
- Qualities of the pastoral team: humility, self-control to not get defensive, courage to act, and flexibility/dynamism

### *Diverse relationships*

- Organic relationships, including those facilitated through small groups
- We do have diversity in terms of age, race, etc., for conversation to happen with grace and wisdom
- We are an increasingly diverse community
- The social events after church help facilitate diverse friendships

### *Outreach to others*

- Willingness to come alongside other faith groups and show loving support (e.g., mosques)
- Our outreach to other organizations and communities—we can bring them together for events, activities, and discussions to increase diversity; and to bring in more people to CRCC
- Cedar Ridge is doing so much compared to some other churches—we set the bar high; no complaints, but of course we should keep striving to do better
- We have a big property that we can open up to the community
- Use of our property to pursue racial and economic justice (farm, solar, farmhouse, etc.)

## **What obstacles presently stand in our way from becoming that kind of community?**

### *Lack of diversity in worship*

- Worship style is not diverse
- Music is white-oriented, not diverse
- More diverse music is a big issue. Hard to find more diverse volunteers within the church—if we can't find them within, need to find them elsewhere. Can we get volunteers from music schools? Invite other people to bring diversity
- We try to be inclusive but are limited by volunteers we have, and also want our songs to reflect our vision
- Have concerns about authenticity and appropriation
- Name the issue: make it clear that we are trying to expand what we do in worship—and don't worry too much about accusations of appropriation
- Who else can support us in trying to sing other genres (e.g., gospel)? Need to open it up more to community and keep an open posture
- Maybe restart the choir—seasonally perhaps, as people have availability
- We have a pensive, quiet, thoughtful culture on Sundays—not exuberant. But that's personality, not just a Black/White issue
- Our services feel white—but changing our music or culture might feel inauthentic
- We have had more lively bands in the past
- The music is not diverse or lively, there is limited representation in the band members, and the style is a challenge (bluegrass twang is a trigger for some people as associated with racism). We need more music genres, and more culturally relevant music
- Past attempts to do this are appreciated—e.g., inclusion of Earth, Wind and Fire, Go Tell It on the Mountain, etc.
- We are limited by our existing band members—we have had some Black musicians in the past, but they have left—we need to do more recruiting
- We should target in-between styles that appeal to a broad range of people; this is not a Black/White binary issue; we should consider our Asian American, Latine, and other members
- Every band/sermon/Sunday is not for you—people will vote with their feet

### *We are predominantly white*

- Congregation is whiter and wealthier than our immediate neighborhood
- Predominance of whites is a barrier to better understanding diversity
- Largely white congregation—need to be intentional in reaching out to people to diversify more
- As a community we are not enthusiastic about inviting others—even though we work and live with diverse populations (many of us have baggage from our past that make us reticent to do that)
- How we describe Cedar Ridge to others is often defensive—what we are not, rather than what we are—because people are burned out with Christianity
- Physical accessibility of Cedar Ridge is a barrier (lack of public transportation)
- We have a very different culture to the churches that meet in our facilities—very different theology, vision, etc. They would not want to attend
- Our inclusivity reduces our accessibility to some other faith communities
- Sometimes people want to be “with my people” (e.g., Latinx churches, deaf community—places where you can just be yourself, speak your language, shared hurts, etc.)
- There are language and cultural barriers, e.g., for Latin and Asian groups
- We are in a culturally diverse area—we need to reflect that
- What is our goal? Have racial make-up that reflects the local community (like our events do—Harvest Festival, etc.)? Lack of clarity around this
- We have diverse populations to our events, but there is a barrier to move from that to joining the church community—many of them are not looking for that
- To be more diverse needs to be intentional, but also puts burden on People of Color to tell white people how to do better, when People of Color just want to follow Jesus
- Don’t want to speak up or be proactive because of being burned in the past and still in the process of healing—and also being a minority in terms of age and ethnicity

### *Dominant white culture*

- Lack of structure and formality in the services may be an issue for some Black people. Or that may be more a reflection of personality, rather than race
- The cultural norms of Cedar Ridge are not as accessible to People of Color as they are for Caucasians
- Caucasian framing of styles of communication, welcoming, worship. Try other forms from other cultures
- We see diversity (there are people of color present), but our culture is predominantly white (People of Color can’t engage authentically as much as they would like). A white frame with diverse people in it
- We need to find out from People of Color what is important to them—like through this process
- We need to pay attention to white normative culture—we need to learn to see it and recognize it for what it is
- E.g., very casual dress is fine at Cedar Ridge—our culture (white privilege to know we will be accepted no matter how we dress), but others may feel they need to “bring their best to God,” or dress well to be taken seriously
- We tend to think of racial justice externally—and assume “we’re fine”—so it takes some effort to reorient to thinking about our church
- Self-reflection is important—stopping to think about what we are saying and why

### *Lack of diversity in staffing*

- More diverse pastoral team would help—if there is an opportunity to expand staffing; good that Board is diverse
- Decisions go through all-white pastoral staff, filters out diversity of organic initiatives

- Current lack of staff diversity—we need a plan to get more diverse applicants
- Lack of diverse staff—and the challenge of not being part of a larger denomination from which to draw applicants

#### *Newcomers don't stay*

- Not sure what makes newcomers not stay
- Tension: we are a low-pressure community, so we don't follow up with those who don't stay (exit interviews are useful!)
- Some people feel they are only accepted up to a point: example of being at a women's retreat—someone refused to share room with her because she is Black
- Why don't we retain more People of Color? They come for a while and then leave
- Is there a way to be who we are (inclusive, fluid, "loosey-goosey") but still retain people from other church backgrounds?
- We don't retain a lot of young people, too
- We are not hospitable: newcomers are not invited into people's homes—it is hard to make deep relationships. We need to be intentional about this
- Bring people into your home, offering hospitality for newcomers (can be overwhelming, but also welcoming), eating together always happens at many churches and is central to the church life. We don't do enough of that
- Reasons why people of color stay at Cedar Ridge: doing life together, contemplative prayer, integrated kids programs, people coming through when needed, feeling seen, being welcoming, providing help with overcoming personal issues

#### *We need to cultivate more diverse relationships*

- Some white cliques—not intentionally hurtful, but can feel exclusionary—lack of intentionality with regards to being inclusive of others (not just of People of Color but anyone not in the group)
- Cliques can be organic—can't force relationships; people want to relate to people with whom they feel comfortable—but we can encourage stepping out beyond our comfort zone
- COVID, missing the face-to-face connection (as someone with health issues)
- Post-COVID has led to less in-person attendance, which is a barrier to relationships
- Language can be a barrier with establishing more relationships with the Spanish-speaking churches that rent our facilities, Guatemalan partners, etc. (although many speak English)
- We need to facilitate more diverse relationships; sharing our stories can make a big difference in how we think about racial issues
- Small groups are not advertised in the flyer—and many are still on zoom. Groups are a good way to get plugged in to the community

#### *Need to think beyond Black and White*

- My (Brazilian) culture is not reflected in the church—so I can't tap into that
- Grew up in a Chinese church—don't expect Asian Americans to find Cedar Ridge appealing
- Racial issues are always framed in terms of Black and White. Asian Americans share a feeling of community and culture, and have a lot of Asian churches to choose from. Not enough people here look like them, with whom they can expect to be instant friends
- Asian Americans tend to be conservative theologically and politically and are unlikely to fit here

### *Need a visible sign of commitment to racial justice*

- The BLM sign is no longer up—but we should have something that’s visible all the time (like the Ukraine prayer station) as a constant reminder, and a place of prayer and lamentation
- The website does not include photos of our diverse congregation
- We should create some way to encapsulate and share the story of our process/growth re. becoming a community that is affirming of LGBTQ people and recognizes the importance of racial justice. We need to let the outside world know what we stand for. This will help attract more diverse people

### *Need to bring more of our community into the conversation*

- By addressing different topics (immigration, education, economic justice, etc.), we can draw more people into the conversation.
- Fatigue, particularly with white suburban people—we’ve read the books, gone to meetings, etc.
- We are all at different stages in the journey—need to bring in the people who are still learning, but also move beyond racial justice 101 and take action; need to make inclusive space for people wherever they are on the journey
- There is an issue of not showing up for things that don’t affect us directly. (It will be interesting to see what percentage of the church attends these gatherings)
- Words are political (or assumed to be)—we have lost people who believe we are taking a political stance—we want to bring people along, but not sacrifice moral principles
- Need to keep the process/conversation going—even if we get fatigued, or if it’s uncomfortable—this is a long journey—we can’t give up or get overwhelmed
- More documentaries would be helpful as opportunities for growth in this area. People can change through learning
- Starting with following Jesus as a force for justice can be scary—there are no clear markers of success—it’s counter-cultural
- Keep reminding people of our vision—we can rally around that—why we keep turning up
- The community as a whole needs to take responsibility for taking action and making change—it takes all of us. We are also a small, dispersed community with big dreams

## **What positive action can we take within our church to become a more racially equitable and inclusive community?**

### *Create more diverse worship experience*

- More diverse worship styles (e.g., integrate gospel music, have a gospel choir)
- Want worship music that speaks to the heart of different ethnicities (e.g., have a chorus in Spanish/other languages, explain why we are singing certain songs, think about who is on stage (not mainly white men), etc.)
- We need to commit to participating in worship styles, topics, events we don’t necessarily resonate with—not be consumer church
- Have a band from another church come and lead worship
- Would like to have diverse, multicultural genres of music—hopefully People of Color will volunteer to play/sing to help with that
- Advertise more for diverse musicians
- Develop a strategy around music: include the pastoral team—talk to some People of Color who have previously been on the worship team, invite community members to join a choir, consider a paid

worship leader, invite guest musicians—make it an action-oriented conversation, and remember it should be worship not entertainment

- Establish a resourced plan to address the lack of diversity in worship
- Solicit suggestions of songs from the congregation to get a more diverse mix for consideration by the band

#### *Hold events*

- Events centered around our differences—celebrate our different cultures and background (e.g., share traditional foods)
- Potlucks—food that reflects aspects of our culture. Celebrating our cultures
- Host activities and events that are targeted to marginalized groups
- Celebrate non-majority culture holidays (e.g., Lunar New Year)—and have it led by someone of that culture
- Hold more events like the MLK event on issues related to race, and encourage people to attend
- Organize events for the local community: e.g., a bazar with vendors who are People of Color for Black History Month, a 5K followed by a lunch—events can increase our exposure and visibility
- Organize a paint night to facilitate friendships
- Hold an open house, and more sangria nights
- Find ways to mix a service with an event as a transition for visitors

#### *Partner with non-white groups*

- Partner with other churches (Latinx, African American) for service projects, potluck lunches, etc.
- Connecting with other churches, working inter-faith, having guest speakers from other churches to increase diversity
- Maybe hold an event with another church or group—like a Guatemalan church
- Would be good to ask other communities what would need to happen for them to attend or visit
- Thinking about who is most drawn to our vision—possibly younger, as well as racially diverse, and different church backgrounds—we have multiple aspects to our identity
- How do we make connections with like-minded people? E.g., Intervarsity groups—going to them rather than expecting them to come to us
- Partner with local African American groups for service projects and co-sponsor events
- Find ways to develop relationships and diversify organically, like reciprocal service days with non-white groups

#### *Continue the conversation*

- Sustain the conversation and not have it be episodic—normalize it, make it be part of who we are—racism will be here for a long time—we want to grow as a community in being a place we can share honestly
- Different formats (over food, in a choir), but keep the conversations going
- Need more of these intentional discussions to reveal our blind spots and learn from one another
- Need to continue to address our unconscious bias. This is a journey, and we never arrive
- Small discussion like these or d-groups are helpful
- Discipleship groups really help strengthen relationships, too, but we tend to pick groups that look like us. Need to intentionally diversify
- Book discussions have been helpful, and could do more of these (e.g., America's Original Sin)
- Have small groups use books written by different authors (Howard Thurman, female theologians, etc.)

- It will not be “safe”—there will be conflict—Jesus pits us against empire, and calls us to love our enemies; love can lead to transformation
- Use God in the Movies and books that reflect diversity
- Send out an anonymous survey to get people’s candid opinions

*Strengthen diverse relationships within our community*

- Find common ground—e.g., parenting—approaching through things that bring us together
- Interviewing people during messages helps bring out points of connection
- Suffering together, serving together, being vulnerable with one another to strengthen a diverse community
- Encourage different discipleship groups to get together to broaden relationships
- Two different groups could get together for a meal—obviously, COVID has had a huge impact on our hospitality, and we are still recovering from that
- More ownership of friendliness at the individual level
- If COVID concerns still limit people’s willingness/ability to offer hospitality, meet up for lunches at a local restaurant after church
- Have the pastor shake everyone’s hand at the door on the way out (although there are virus-spreading concerns)
- Bring back name tags
- Promote the online church directory and encourage people to add their photos

*Increase visibility of our commitment to racial justice*

- Add photos of our diverse congregation to the website (Natalie has a photographer friend who could help with this)
- Use the farmhouse for racial justice education initiatives
- Add a plaque somewhere about the indigenous tribes who used to be present in the area
- Install a social justice gallery and stories in the main building
- Do something at the Harvest Festival to diversify the presentation of our community
- Put a rainbow pride flag and Black Lives Matter sign/flag, or even a sticker in the window, where you enter the church to signify that people of color and queer people will be safe here

*Diversify staff*

- More diverse staff
- Use proven practices for attracting diverse job applicants (Chris does this for his job and can help with this)
- Design a staff position for community outreach that is attractive to a member of the communities we are trying to reach

*Hold trainings*

- Train people on how to receive feedback and how to call people in (rather than call people out)
- Training on things we think we know—what is white normative culture, interpersonal skills, etc.
- Bring in a culture coach

*Address racial justice with kids and youth*

- Need to think about what we teach our children, and what they see in us (and therefore imitate)
- Not sure what kids and youth are taught about racial justice, but values and issues that are important for us should be taught to youth and kids, too—integration with all ages is important