



The Rocky Mountain American Baptist

A Newsletter of the American Baptist Churches in the Rocky Mountain Region

About this Edition



“Regathering” this summer

Note: This edition of our newsletter was originally planned to promote and highlight our September 2020 Gathering. But like so many other things, our plans were impacted by COVID-19 ... plans not just for this newsletter, but also for our Gathering. So the theme changed from “The Gathering” to our “Regathering.”

Our Gathering committee “regathered” their plans and are planning a wonderful, virtual event with the theme of

Ruach: *breath, wind, spirit.* Mike Oldham has written a wonderful article that describes the plans that are being made and a reminder for you to save the date. Many of our congregations are “regathering” as stay-at-home orders are loosened. You will want to read some of the stories and things to consider as you and your congregation move ahead with your plans.



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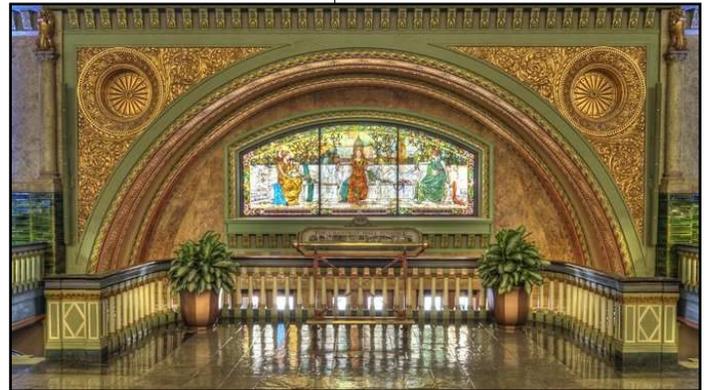
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Servant Offering

The Whispering Arch, ABCRM and Racism ...

I don’t remember why we were in downtown St. Louis that day... we were probably entertaining out-of-town guests... but for whatever reasons, we found ourselves at St. Louis’s Union Station and entering its grand entry. One of my children previously had been on a field trip there and knew the story of “The Whispering Arch,” an architectural phenomenon of the 40-plus foot wide opening off the main hall.

According to legend, during its construction, it had been discovered that any particular sound would travel through the arch from one side to the other. Apparently, when someone dropped a hammer at one side while working on the arch, the noise was “trapped” in the arch and traveled the length of its width to the other side.

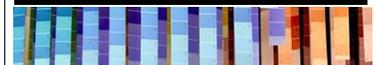


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“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”
— Martin Luther King, Jr.,
Minister

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Continued from page 1 ... Of course, they also later discovered that you can stand and whisper into the wall on one side and hear the whisper on the other, even over the noise of the hustle and bustle outside.

While interesting, it is not unique. There are “whispering arches” all around the world. It is simply a matter of science as to how they work, but it does require certain key elements ... not something of which architects necessarily plan for ... especially today. But, it still makes for a very enjoyable phenomenon when these conditions are achieved.

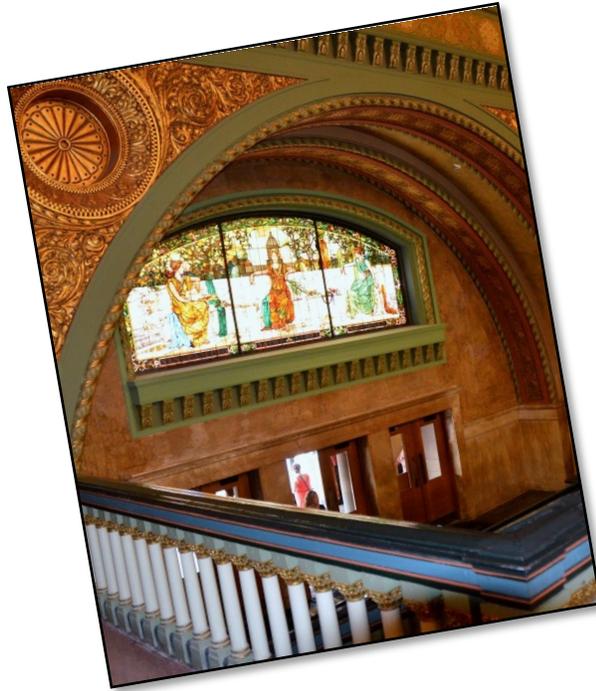
So why am I talking about an obtuse architectural characteristic of some old buildings?

Well, it seems an apt metaphor for the situation we find ourselves in here, and around the country.

You see, this feature allows two groups of people (separated by distance) both to

speak and also to hear each other above the din and business that surrounds them. This “background noise” would normally prevent normal, direct communication and understanding between the groups. But the wonders of our world provided them with a way... an unusual way ... to communicate.

Similarly, there exists in our culture today, groups of people separated by their race, culture and experience that need to communicate with one another at a deep level. But the cacophony of our culture seems to keep one another from hearing the depth and the core of each other’s concerns, experiences and heartaches. The “truth” that these groups possess individually need to be cultured, amended and matured by the “truths” that other groups possess. These groups need to work together to discover a more complete truth, to build consensus on the challenges that can be addressed and understanding about those that are beyond us at this time.



But the cacophony of the hustle and bustle around us prevents this from happening. The frustrated emotions pour out in protests, anger and unfortunately destruction from all sides ... not just one. If only there were something that would allow the whispers of truth that come out from them to be amplified and communicated in a manner so that they could be heard by everyone. If only these “whispers” could grow into heart-felt conversations.

And maybe, just maybe, ABCRM has the unique organizational structure, demographic make-up and available resources to be the archway that serves to create the communication and cooperation to address one another’s concerns, hear the hearts of the other and begin to build bridges, dig tunnels and tear down the walls and sub-structures of racism in our culture.

That at least is the dream that we share and why our Executive Committee has authorized not only the creation of an on-going task force (we are well aware that this is not a one and done proposition!). It is why they have authorized the appointment of a part-time staff person to be the staff’s team leader in these efforts (see the appointment announcement in this newsletter) and unanimously proclaimed that this must be one of our region’s core foci going forward.

But the “Whispering Arch” does not whisper by itself ... it depends on the whispers of the families, friends and other people who pass through the station taking time to stop and to give it a try.

And so, too, must our efforts going forward in order to make a dent in the problems of racism in the U.S. and around the world. And though our efforts can only do so much in a very small part of our world, just like the whispering arches ... ours will not be the only ones being made.

Surely a Master Architect that created the beauty of our natural monuments, such as the mountains, has built enough “arches” to get the job done!

*In Christ,
Steve Van O*

... Inside this Edition ...

Continued from page 1 ... Social activists, protestors, law enforcement, politicians and indeed people from all walks of life have “regathered” to express their frustration with the continued loss of life of Black Men through encounters with police. These are but an expression of greater concerns about racial injustice that continues to perpetuate itself and feels as if

we have stepped back instead of forward. So, we hope you will appreciate what we have written and especially appreciate the hard-work and the wonderful progress that Brian Keithline has made in revamping our Regional Communications. I and the rest of the staff, truly appreciate his expertise, knowledge and hard work!

Staff Transitions & Additions

ABCRM remains focused on our core mission of *Empowered Churches* and relies heavily upon our staff to fulfill that mission. We are proud of our staff and thankful for the care that our Board gives to them.

At the May meeting of our ABCRM Executive Committee, I shared with the Board Rev. Dr. Larron Jackson’s intent to retire at the end of September. Larron has faithfully served us as our Ministry and Mission Coach for the Denver Cluster since 2012 and has filled our hearts with his boisterous laugh and well timed encouragements (*Somebody ought to say Amen!*).

Larron has said that he has a number of projects that he wants to do in the years to come and despite his love of the churches needs to reclaim time for these. Stay tuned for plans to honor him and bid him a proper “**Thank you.**”

At our Winter Board meeting, I requested that the Board approve and fund for a minimum of three years a full-time staff position for a *Minster to Future Leaders*. This position will be responsible for identifying, recruiting and helping leaders who might serve the future church to find training. The Board approved this proposal, but because of the shutdown, we delayed our search until we had a clearer picture of the future. One of the key things about this position is that as we see the church change, we will have to adapt our strategies to serve those whom God calls, be they young folks who will serve 10 years down the road, or a lay leader who might step into the pulpit without training and get OJT, or even identifying leaders from other tribes who might find ABC a better fit.

After reviewing a number of applications and conducting interviews with the most qualified, I am

pleased to announce that [Ms. Lauren Parliament](#) was offered and accepted the position beginning July 1. Lauren has been serving as a Seminary Intern for the past couple of years and many of you already know her. She will be pursuing ordination through her home church in Sioux Falls, SD and in addition to other duties will take on the responsibilities for Coordinating Front Range Camping, allowing Mike to focus more on his passion of helping churches discover Mission and Ministry in their context.

Finally, when the Executive Committee approved making Anti-Racism an on-going effort, it was suggested that we find and appoint a Team Leader for this effort sooner rather than later. We plan to make staff ministry positions into more global positions: serving all our churches in specific areas of ministry rather than being generalists in ministry to a single cluster. Our goal is to employ a team approach on all areas of focus, and to designate team leaders for key areas.

I am pleased to announce that **Rev. Rodney Perry** has agreed to come alongside us on a part-time basis to fill this position. Assuming all goes well, Rev. Perry will also pick up facilitating the Denver Cluster once Rev. Jackson completes his service.

Rev. Perry also served as an intern with the Region a few years back prior to becoming pastor of Central Baptist Church. Now that he has his feet under him at Central, he and his leadership believe that he is able to come alongside in this critical focus area.

I am excited by the team we have put together to serve you and trust that you are and will be just as excited as you get to know our ministry team better in the days to come.

Steve Van O



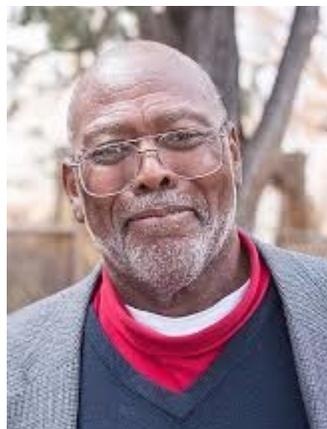
On Nov. 18, 1973, a *Denver Post* sports photographer captured an image that seemed to represent the mantra of its main subject—a young man who—at the time—was an unexpectant minister-in-the-making.

This particular photograph, now digitally archived and preserved in sports memorabilia, clearly shows the gregarious Denver Broncos' Guard Larron D. Jackson (at the time, playing as a tackle). However, the deeper story featured in this black-and-white print is even more unmistakable: Jackson had just broken through the formidable Pittsburgh Steelers' defense.

Behind him was Floyd Little carrying the ball in what would result in another tally mark in the "win" column that season.

That photograph—among others—has served as a common metaphor for Jackson's nearly 42-year ministerial career. As a street-smart pastor with a huge heart and a boisterous laugh, Jackson has opened up lanes for others to discover a relationship with Jesus Christ—and to experience victory in their lives.

But now, after numerous pastoral roles in his life, and more recently, as the Ministry and Missions Coach for the Denver Cluster (for the past eight years), Jackson



has called an audible. He is scheduled to retire from his regional work at the end of September. But don't

expect to see Rev. Dr. Larron D. Jackson, DMin., sitting on the sidelines. He's still fully invested in God's gridiron to help win over hearts and to further God's Kingdom.

In fact, Jackson, who turns 71-years-old in August, has a renewed sense of optimism, health and spiritual focus.

"I'm in good health, and I still have a lot of things to do,"

Jackson declared. "I feel like the good Lord is now calling me to that fourth quarter of life. And, a lot can happen in the fourth quarter!"

Experience Matters

As a young man who grew up on the tough and violent streets of St. Louis, Jackson has an acute appreciation for how God's Grace and the Gospel message can transform the "grittiness" of urban life. After all, he has witnessed firsthand the "legalized discrimination and racism" that still percolates throughout society.

Those experiences have always motivated him to advocate for others.

As a professional football player, Jackson lobbied on the behalf of the players being exploited by the National Football League in the early seventies. Then, as God called him into ministry, and blessed his enrollment at Candler School of

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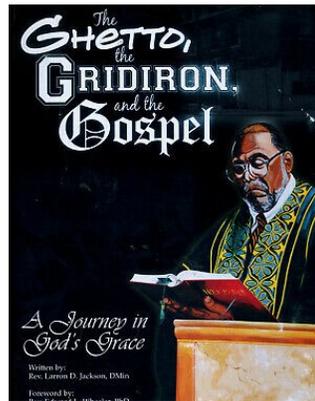
Gospel Gridiron: What's ahead ...

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Theology, Jackson pursued his passion to serve in some of the “roughest neighborhoods” in order “to plant, build, and to grow community.”

“I’ve always had a fire in me,” Jackson said. “And that fire still is there. God has given me a spirit to work for transformation—to speak truth, and to put together a plan to overcome obstacles and to lead others to victory.”

To that extent, much of his personal life, and his passion for servanthood, has been well-documented in his autobiography, *The Ghetto, The Gridiron and The Gospel: A Journey in God's Grace*. His reflections on life seem even more poignant given the turbulent events of 2020—from the COVID-19 pandemic to the national protests for social justice and equality. The synchronism of these current events with his retirement have only further affirmed his desire to return to his previous work in curriculum development and support for the African American church and community.



Past victories for what's ahead

“I see hope in the midst of despair,” Jackson said. “God is always shaping you for where he is taking you—and I’ve seen lately how new technology and ways of reaching others allows us to speak into their lives in a more holistic manner.”

As with any good game plan, the strategy for “what’s ahead” is still “in the works.” And, so much more could be written about Jackson’s past accomplishments.

But perhaps a short analogy is the best predictor for Jackson’s future—another metaphor that’s borrowed from a different type of ball game.

At twelve years of age, Jackson said he became “aware” of the segregation and poverty in his neighborhood. Instead of viewing the situation as a limitation, he saw it as an opportunity to “do more with less.” He rallied the other neighborhood boys on the block and together, they gathered some rubber balls and mop sticks to play stickball.

“We started going around and challenging other boys on other blocks to play ball with us. Things went so well—it got sophisticated quickly! We expanded to other neighborhoods and parks, even some that were located in more predominately white areas.”

Eventually, this stickball endeavor turned into the boys’ own Little League program.

“God is never done with us—or we should never feel that way,” Jackson recently said with one of his immeasurable smiles. “We need to let God lead us and to transform us—and with a little organization and effort, the opportunities are endless. That’s what I’m looking forward to as a way to honor Him with the rest of my life.”

Plus, never forget that Jackson knows how to overcome obstacles.

As a former offensive lineman who “knew how to move people against their will,” Jackson is now content with letting God clear those lanes—

and to open those paths—so that Jackson himself can deliver the Good News to whomever—and wherever—God might send him next. And with that, we can all say a hearty “Amen!”

Rev. Dr. Larron D. Jackson, DMin, has served in various ministerial roles throughout the country; has guided the outreach ministries of three major faith institutions; has taught at several major colleges and seminaries; has an extensive background in curriculum development for church and community; has worked in international ministry; is a published author; a former NFL football player for the Denver Broncos and the Atlanta Falcons, and a member of The Missouri Sports Hall of Fame. As he pursues the next stages of his life, he may be reached at Ljackministries@aol.com.

The Gathering 2020: *Pivot, Adapt, and How to learn on the Go*

This year has been the year of transitions, pivots, and adapting to new technology. One pastor shared that



they had been talking about moving to online giving for several years. Within a month, they were up and ready to go. Churches that never seriously thought about putting their worship services online are now recording their service and posting it to multiple platforms.

The 2020 ABCRM Gathering is also pivoting from a face-to-face meeting to an online meeting Sept. 24-26, 2020. What is an “Online Gathering” going to look like? Well we have some ideas, but the reality is that we are learning on the go just like pastors and churches have done for the last three months.

First, we will offer several workshops. Instead of these being offered during the Gathering, we will offer several workshops in the weeks leading up to the Gathering. These can be watched live with interaction with the leader or watched at another time more convenient to your schedule.

The second major shift in formatting will be the way we interact with our global servants. Each year, one of the highlights of the Gathering is to hear from some of our incredible global servants. We always struggle to give them enough “face time” at the Gathering. This year they will. We will feature a different missionary each Monday in October. They will be able share a recorded message and we will have time to have a Zoom meeting with them.

Each year, the highlight of the Gathering is the Friday evening worship. We will have live worship again this year. Rev. Dr. Steve Van Ostran will be sharing his vision for our region and our churches in the midst of a pandemic and as we seek racial justice.

And of course we will have a business meeting. This



is one of the areas where we are learning on the go. Since only delegates can vote, we will need to make sure that we have procedures in place to make sure everyone’s vote counts.

One of the fun adaptations we will try is for the Clergy Dinner. Each year, we enjoy celebrating our pastors and their spouses with a good dinner and entertainment. After discussing multiple options, we decided we would try to create an online cooking class. I know, nothing like having pastors cook their own dinner! Before the Gathering, pastors will receive a menu and a shopping list. A professional chef will prepare the “instructional videos” for the cooking class. On Thursday, September 24, pastors will join a Zoom meeting from their kitchens. Together, we will watch the instructions, laugh together, and then show off our MAD COOKING SKILLS. For those who join us on Zoom, they will be reimbursed for the ingredients they bought for the dinner.

Will it work? We don’t really know, but we think it will be fun, or a total disaster. Just like many of our attempts in the kitchen.

We hope you will join us for this unusual, exciting and a little bit off the wall Gathering.

Mike Oldham

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"Our father who art in heaven. Hallowed by Thy name. Thy Kingdom come,

Thy will be done on earth..."

The joy of growing up a Dutch/Norwegian kid born in Southwestern Minnesota was the statement I heard a lot: *"If you ain't Dutch, you ain't much."*

I got such comfort from knowing I was part of such an elite class of human beings who knew we were right about everything. About religion. About politics. About morals and virtue. About race.

I literally remember thinking, "It's so amazing that we have the correct view of scripture and life. Those people who don't believe like we do, well, sucks to be them."

Then I turned fourteen and started to realized other people felt the same way about their lives. About their ethnicity. About their political position. *The nerve of such stupidity!*

Living in a world of **sameness** was all I knew most of my formative years. People who looked like me, spoke like me, thought like me, listened to the same music as me, went to church with me, had the same values as me, and hated the same things as me.

It was probably my Christian high-school friend, Randy, who started to help open my eyes to my sin of sameness. He lead me to Jesus my senior year of High School and shortly before graduation I learned that he was gay.



Kim Skattum

It would be an understatement to say learning Christian Randy was gay shook my world.

As we talked and went to church together, a slow but steady change was taking place in my heart. Something like scales of blindness began to fall off my eyes. I began to read the Bible seriously.

But, in all honesty, my sin of sameness did not serve me well in reading the scriptures. In fact I was so jammed full of judgementalism, pride, exclusivity and right-ness that I would only see and underline the passages that agreed with me and my particular positions in life.

College further challenged my commitment to sameness. So did getting married and adopting children. And becoming a pastor. And serving my neighbors.

I began to understand that my choosing to only hang with people like me was the breeding ground for the **sin of sameness** which would only reinforce my wicked notions of superiority and prejudice.

Eventually I made a game-changing decision about 15 years ago; to seek out people with whom I might become friends who are not like me and hang with them.

It gave me encouragement when I'd read Rev. 7:9 *"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

Realizing that in the Kingdom of God, the very one Jesus prayed would come, there is absolutely no support for my sin of sameness. In fact, God's Kingdom screams for diversity and love and deference.

In struggling against my sin of sameness with the help of

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The Sin of Sameness ...

Continued from page 7...

the Holy Spirit and choosing to become actual friends with people NOT like me.

I've been learning some things.

I've learned from my homeless friends Ron, Mandi and Joseph that many homeless people are bright, intelligent and live on the streets by choice. And I learned (from them) a level of fierce commitment to one another that humbles me.

I've learned about commitment and grace from my gay neighbors, Steve & Ray and Shaun & Rich.

I've learned from my black pastor friend, Victor, that my heart still harbors prejudice and privilege that largely stems from my own ignorance. And from my black daughter that her heart gets viciously stabbed by careless and sometimes intentional statements about race or color.

I've learned from women in ministry that women are vital and necessary leaders/pastors in the church of Jesus.

I've learned from my 18-year-old bike shop manager that living in the United States as an undocumented person is frighteningly difficult.

I've learned serving the poor in the fullness of serving means I must accept being served by them as well. Simply serving can reinforce a sense of power and authority in me unless I learn to humbly accept being served.

I've learned that unless I fight, with the **breath** of the **Spirit** the **sin of sameness** in my narrow, dark heart, I will always be working against the Kingdom of God on earth.

And I've learned that God is patient and loving with uber-jerks like me. And that if you ain't Dutch ... it's probably better that way.

*Kim Skattum,
Pastor-to-Pastor*

The Question Is Yet Before The House

"We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whosoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 Jn. 4:19-21, NIV).

The racial climate and tension that is yet confronting America is not new. As a black person growing up in America during the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and beyond, I have seen this kind of racial tension played out repeatedly over the years. That which fueled the tension between white America and black America was usually grounded in human rights, civil rights and receiving justice under "the laws of the land." *What makes the current climate of racial violence so different and provocative in America?* Maybe technology in the hands of ordinary people.

That which we would normally have to wait to see on the 6 p.m. news before becoming angry is now immediately accessible twenty-four hours a day through the various technology mediums. Maybe we are seeing the "fruits" of battles won in days gone by at local, state and national levels. Maybe "racism" is indeed dying a "slow but steady death".

As I reflect on the current climate of violence and racism in America, my mind, heart and spirit often cause me to reflect on the leadership style, Christian values and writings of the one whom history calls "The Drum Major Justice for America." That person is none other than the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

As Dr. King picked up the mantle to fight against racism and injustice in America, his weapons for this warfare were rooted and grounded in "love and the Christian faith." As I think about the current season of racism and injustice in which we find ourselves as a nation I am reminded of the final book that Dr. King wrote. The title of that book is, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community*. Although Dr. King will always be remembered for the speech that he gave to the nation on Aug. 28, 1963, in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. That speech will forever be remembered as the, "I Have A Dream" speech. And, although Dr. King addressed a number of issues, ills and injustices in his speech on that Au- *Continued on next page ...*

The Question Before the House: *Do we choose chaos or community?*

Continued from page 8...

gust afternoon in 1963, that was only a portion of his hope and dream for America and the world in which we live.

At the center of Dr. King's theology and his hope for both America and the world was a greater vision. His vision was that all humanity would come to know the joy, peace and love of living in harmony with each other. Dr. King called that place, "**The Beloved Community/The World House.**" Dr. King said that the greatest threat to "The Beloved Community" or the harmony in "The World House" is racism. Dr. King also said the following regarding the danger of racism to "The Beloved Community and The World House":

"Among the moral imperatives of our times, we are challenged to work all over the world with the unshakeable de-

termination to wipe out the last vestiges of racism ... Racism is no mere American phenomenon. Its vicious grasp knows no geographic boundaries ..." (Chaos and Community, 173).

In essence Dr. King said that "racism", and all of its manifestations, is the ultimate evil known to humanity.

Dr. King constantly confronted evil wherever evil raised its diabolical head. His weapons for warfare were love and faith. In spite of all of the trials of life and faith that he encountered as he lived into his faith of seeing "The Beloved Community" on earth, he held fast to his weapons of love and faith. Love and faith fueled the fires of Dr. King's soul until that fateful April 4, 1968 day in Memphis.

Dr. King's ultimate dream was that one day by the power and love of God made manifest through Jesus Christ:

- 1) Evil and hatred will raise the "white flag" of surrender and love would prevail; and,

- 2) Humanity would "one day" arrive at that place in their heart called "The Beloved Community" and there would be unending room and love in "The World House" for all who gathered there.

The Question Is Yet Before The House, "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?"

- 1) What do we say to the evil that resides in our heart, as well, in the hearts of all humanity?
- 2) What do we say to the "systemic ills" that are deeply ingrained in us and others in the world in which we live?
- 3) For those of us who profess to be Christians, what

do we hear Jesus Christ saying to us regarding Love? Brotherhood and Sisterhood with all humanity?: (Deut. 10:17-19; Jn. 13:34-35; Jn. 15:1-12; Rom. 12:9; 1 Thes. 3:11-13; and 1 Pet. 1:18-23).

"The Question Is Yet Before The House," which will you choose, "Chaos" or "Community"?

Prayer: Father God, as we seek to walk after Jesus Christ in this broken

world, please help us to surrender our hearts, minds and spirits into Your Holy hands so that as You speak into our lives by the power of Your Holy Spirit we will hear You and obey You when You speak. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Larron Jackson, DMin.



ABCRM Camp Updates

Although physical camps have been canceled this summer due to the Coronavirus:

- **CAMP WYOBA:** has two more "work weeks" scheduled for July 6-10, Aug. 3-7. Please e-mail Jenita at mjmjpack@vcn.com for more information and to sign up.
- **FRONT RANGE CAMPING:** is hosting a virtual camp, "Survivors" July 19-24. Go to www.fronrangepcamping.org to learn more.
- **GRAND MESA:** will continue to post updates at <https://grandmesabaptistcamp.org/>

To achieve real change in society, we need to go deeper and get uncomfortable

Book Review

As the protests fade from the first stories that we heard on the evening news, now *what do we do?* If we want the terrible actions against people of color to stop, *what do we need to do?* Why haven't things changed?

These questions and others like them occupy my thoughts. I listen to a lot of books

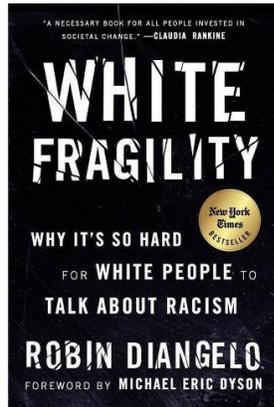
(I have over 1,500 books in my Audible.com account), so I looked for books to help me understand more about the issue. The book, *White Fragility - Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, was at the top of many lists of current "best sellers". So, I purchased it along with a couple others.

What is white fragility? It is the defensive reaction white people have when the topic of racism is raised. We start explaining why we are not racist, but the reality is we are all swimming in the water of our culture. Racism isn't just intentional acts committed by mean people. Social scientists understand racism as a *multidimensional* system that ensures an unequal allocation of resources between racial groups. We have been socialized into racist systems affecting education, healthcare, criminal justice, banking, economics, etc.

You might already be feeling uncomfortable with this topic – that is white fragility. We will need to work through our discomfort. Robin DeAngelo, the author, says we need to start by asking:

"What does it mean to be white? How has being white shaped my life?"

- **Educate** yourself by reading, watching and listening to works by people of color
- **Practice** humility - ongoing practice that must



be integrated into your life

The author maintains there will be no change if we are just "really nice...smile at people of color... go to lunch together on occasion". We must go much deeper – we must get uncomfortable.

In fact, Steve Van Ostran, ABCRM's Executive Minister, recently challenged the Region to join together to make the work of eliminating institutional socialized racism as one of ABCRM's core function. *I hope you will join with us.*

Karen Van

Resources for more conversations

Literature:

- * *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, helps people work on their own white fragility and racism
- * *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, highlights the racial dimensions of the war on drugs
- * *I Know Why the Cage Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, autobiography of her early years (coming of age)
- * *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, asks powerful questions about race, class, and gender
- * *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James H. Cone, faith, Race, and the American experience
- * *Locking Up Our Own* by James Forman Jr., lessons on the future of race and the criminal justice system

Media:

- * 1619 (*New York Times*), Examines the legacy of American Slavery
- * Momentum: A Race Forward Podcast, features voices, stories, and strategies for racial justice
- * 13th (Netflix) – documentary, the film explores the intersection of race, justice, and mass incarceration in the United States.
- * If Beale Street Could Talk (Hulu), seamlessly weaves multiple topical issues like racism, police brutality, prison injustice, young love, financial struggle, class disparity, and many more between the pages of this book.
- * Mercy, follows a history-making battle for justice.

Lauren Parliament

How a Western Slope church is building bridges, and 'constructing' community in their neighborhood

Bringing Asian refugees into an established autonomous church can be a risky and demanding transition. When I am asked about the church that I pastor, I often say that I lead Delta First Baptist Church and the Karen Baptist Fellowship in Delta, Colorado.

Here is an edited timeline of our history with our Karen cousins:

- In 2010, Steve Van Ostran came to Delta FBC and planted the seed of becoming a receiving church for Karen refugees living in Denver, coming from Myanmar by way of refugee camps in Thailand.
- 2011, first contact with Karen migrant workers in Delta County. The first Karen family moved to Delta from Denver. Delta FBC youth & leaders went to Denver to lead a week of VBS at Ebenezer Ethnic Baptist Church. This continued for six years. Pastor James Conley went to Myanmar/Thailand on a pastors study mission.
- 2012, new 41-unit migrant workers' apartment complex opens in Delta with 30 Karen families moving in between February and August.

We helped organize, and hosted tutoring help for students in middle and high school with local volunteers meeting twice weekly (2012-2014).

We registered students for classes, set up appointments for healthcare and transfer of government benefits, and whatever else was needed. Since 2016, we have seen more than twenty Karen men and women apply, test, and become naturalized US citizens.

Karen children and youth have integrated into established programs of the church including mission teams, Awana Club, VBS, and youth group. Karen adults also have taken ESL classes through the public library and local school system. Karen families participate in our main worship on Sunday morning then



Pla So Kay, owner of a Habitat for Humanity home in Delta holds a worship blessing service with family at his new home.



together share a Karen language worship service every Sunday at 12:30 p.m. in a classroom (50 attendees).

Currently, fifteen Karen families live in Delta and they all attend First Baptist Church, and Karen Baptist Fellowship. COVID-19 hit our Karen community with six positive cases in April. Fortunately, each person has fully recovered and are healthy once again. We were able to share food boxes from the church and cleaning supplies and instruction in Karen from Delta County Health & Human Services.

Community is so important to our Karen neighbors, yet they have adapted as others have through this pandemic. Our refugee families have enhanced our entire church family. Delta First Baptist Church has become more diverse ethnically since receiving our Asian sisters and brothers. *Are we fully integrated? No. Is there more work in our future? Yes, definitely. And still, we are the children of God together red, yellow, black, and white, and we are precious in His sight.*

*James Conley
Western Slope Facilitator*



*"To **plant a garden** is to believe in **tomorrow**," (Audrey Hepburn)*

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