



The Ephesus Project

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For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. Ephesians 2:14-16 (NIV)

Purpose:

The Ephesus Project (EP) is a church/pulpit exchange that supports the local church in taking steps to dismantle thoughts, understanding, and actions that keep us from becoming *one new humanity*. As followers of Jesus, we seek to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We have seen on a global scale that too often we have not been practicing what we preach. Through the exchange, we can make racial justice and equity a reality in our lives, churches and eventually in our nation.

How the Ephesus Project Works:

First, we ask you to register [here](#) so that we are aware that you are doing a church/pulpit exchange. Below are recommended steps you can take but you are welcome to do anything that you feel helps your church grow closer to the commitment that “racism is incompatible with Christian teaching.” If you register and submit an [Ephesus Project Annual Report](#), we will invite 2 representatives from your church to attend an annual celebration.

We recommend that the pastor and a ministry team partner together to lead the EP. Based on feedback from others who have done a church exchange, having the pastor participate in a leadership role is one of the most important components to the success of the project. If the pastors (Shepherds) of both churches are not together in heart and mind, they will be challenged in leading the congregation (sheep) to its ultimate goal.

We realize that most churches would prefer to partner with a church with a different racial make-up. However, It is not necessary for a White to select a church that is racially diverse from itself. A significant majority of churches in the Northern Illinois Conference are predominantly White. The number of churches that are predominantly made up of People of Color is much smaller. Be prayerful and creative in choosing a church. For example,

you may find a racially homogenous church that you can do book studies with or projects provided by the Anti-racism Task Force such as participating in the Learning Path, the Becoming the Beloved Community workshops, joining the Champion Team, etc.

Phase I: Introductions (6 months or as needed)

- Find a partner church (we encourage you to seek a United Methodist Church but it is not required.).
- Introductions (Pastors get to know each other and their congregation)
- Create Ephesus Project Team (EPT), your strategy planning team
- Prayerfully discern how God is present and guiding you in this work
- Introduction to Congregation
 - Pulpit exchange - Pastors only
 - Partnership Icebreakers/Meet and Greet (Small group or whole congregation)
 - Invitations to join each other's events
 - Shared book discussions on the subject of racism
 - Evaluate and plan for next phase
(how you're doing, what does and does not work and what you and your congregations are learning, determine if changes need to be made on the EPT before moving to the next phase.)

Phase II: The Hard Talk: Speak Up (9 months to a year or as needed)

- Have a joint meeting with the EPT of both churches and evaluate together any changes that need to be made before moving to Phase II.
- Continue pulpit/congregation exchange, messages on racism
 - Plan ways to have the difficult conversations
 - a. Small group meetings and discussions on the subject of racism, police brutality, white privilege, etc.)
 - b. Book discussion group and Bible study group on the subject of racism
 - Evaluation and planning for the next phase
(how you're doing, what does and does not work, changes you made in your strategies and what your congregations have and are learning)

Phase III: Mission Together: Speak Out (9 months to a year or as needed)

- Have a joint meeting with the EPT of both churches and evaluate together any changes that need to be made before moving to Phase III.
- Continue pulpit/choir/congregation exchange
- Find a mission and justice project to do together
 - a. Crop Walk, BLM marching, Feed the Need, Mission Distribution Center, LGBTQI+ march, research project to learn more about the harms of systemic racism, etc.

It is important to keep in mind that this is a partnership. Pastors/Church Councils must come together and be as much as possible of like heart and mind. Their planning and implementation schedules for each phase must be the same. The amount of time spent on an activity in a phase is left to the discretion of the Pastor/Church Council/EP Team. Both churches should be ready to move to the next phase at the same time. This might require timeline adjustments for a particular phase.

The Ephesus Project's purpose is to help ensure that the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility of racism would break down as "Christians and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of us agree with one another in what we say and that there be no divisions among us but that we be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1Corinthians 1:10).

Questions? Email Yvette Harris-Black at divaeva65@gmail.com or Rev. Jeremiah Lee at hkjeremiahlee@gmail.com.