

# Making Room for Everyone

By Kim Shockley

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In June I attended the School of Reconciliation at Duke Divinity School. I can honestly say that it was a difficult experience. We learned about lament – singing the Doxology in a minor key. We experienced white supremacy in government as we talked with a black pastor in Dallas TX who bumped up against policies designed intentionally to keep white leaders in power. I confronted my own white privilege as I interacted with other students. This week was transformative, because my eyes were opened to more injustice in our American culture. I attended thinking that I would learn some things about how to work with the black churches in our district. I came away realizing that I needed to have a stronger voice with our white churches who don't realize they look through white privileged lenses.

Peggy McIntosh writes in her article – *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack* – “I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless backpack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.”

I am a white woman working with men, I am a lay person working in a clergy dominated field, and I am left-handed which really does lead me to tangible adjustments; so I do know a little bit about being less privileged. I can go to the mall and move freely without being watched. I can drive in unfamiliar neighborhoods without fear of being followed by the police. I can rent or purchase a home without issues. I see other white people leading companies, broadcasting the news, and generally widely represented throughout our media. I also see mostly white people (as our Justice and Reconciliation Team attests) on the stage at our Western North Carolina Conference sessions. I really don't need to think about these things because that is just normal for white people.

But it is not normal for everyone – and that is white privilege. The School of Reconciliation taught me to think about these things differently, and to be able to name them as white privilege. Our brothers and sisters of color simply want us to acknowledge that white privilege exists. We can recognize it and when appropriate, name it in the situation, begin to work for more justice for all.

One of the activities that was used at the School of Reconciliation was to partner with a person and look them in the eyes for 20 seconds. It was a powerful example of humanity and seeing each other as persons. Many of the communities throughout this district have both black and brown and white United Methodist congregations within them. What would it look like to begin or continue to do some ministries together? Would it be possible to gather to study issues of race relations? How is God calling you to be aware of each other in your town? Who do you need to look in the eyes and truly see? If you want to know more about this, come visit Mt Pleasant UMC, First UMC, and Common Ground campuses in Stanley - they function well as a UM presence in their neighborhoods! Being disciples of Jesus together is changing that world!