



Taking Our Blinders Off

January 16, 2019

Rachel Yates

Reconciliation, our theme for the year, starts with us recognizing where we have hurt others. Until we've seen the resentment or pain we've caused, we're unable to repent or to seek forgiveness.

You would think that identifying how we've hurt people would be easy enough. I suspect that most of us go through the day trying to be respectful and kind. We act charitably toward others. In our ministries, we try to be hospitable and welcoming. Sure, we might annoy people with our driving or by cheering for the wrong team, but those are minor offenses.

So, we should be able to count on one hand the number of times we've actually hurt a colleague or friend or family member. We should be able to point to the specific instances when, as the church, we offended someone or drove them away.

Perhaps.

I worry though that we too often have blinders on that keep us from clearly seeing the wake of damaged relationships or distrust we've created, both as individuals and as the church. Before we take a deep dive into the topic of reconciliation at our February 19 Presbytery Gathering, we must be humble enough to recognize the very real possibility that we've hurt others and not even noticed. "Lord, when was it that we saw you...?" (Matt. 25:44).

One example of our blinders is the area of race relations. As a white woman, I can coast along through my day, never thinking of my "whiteness." I don't experience being white when I pump gas into my car, go to the bank, or pass someone on the sidewalk. "Whiteness" doesn't feel like a thing because I'm swimming in a largely white society, set up for and maintained by white people. And, in my interactions with people of all colors, I use my good behaviors of being respectful, kind, charitable, hospitable, and welcoming to create a – false – sense of confidence that I'm not hurting people of color. My blinders need to come off.

In May, Dr. Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*, will facilitate our conversation around racial reconciliation, helping us to recognize systems of racism that we perpetuate, usually without a clue.

Before then, however, there are multiple opportunities to explore the topic of racism and to see our collective roles in allowing it to continue. At the February Presbytery Gathering, Angela Ogelsby, our Synod Vice Moderator, will describe her visit to Alabama with other synod executives to witness our country's history of racism. Also check out this week's Fresh Impressions for invitations to:

- Bystander Intervention training in response to public racist, sexist, anti-Muslim, and other harassment, at Tippecanoe Presbyterian Church, January 24 or January 26; and
- Dr. Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*, at Immanuel Presbyterian Church, February 23, 1-4 pm

This is bound to feel uncomfortable. Whenever we face our missteps, it's unpleasant. But, trust me, it's necessary and important. We'll walk this journey together, and we'll be better off for it.