Beneath the Surface

Report on CCRJ's Fact-finding and Education Visit to the United States of America

May 3-17 2005

CHURCHES' COMMISSION FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

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by
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Secretary Churches' Commission for Racial Justice

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Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

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Introduction

Over the past thirty-five years race and community relations in Britain have perceivably improved, it may properly be claimed, though this is often difficult precisely to measure. Yet, racism and racial discrimination remain a distinct threat to the social and political fabric of society, to the practice of genuine equality, and to the development of intercultural communities.

This threat is manifested in many social problems: institutional discrimination in the public services; the exclusion of disproportionate numbers of black and minority ethnic children from school; significant under-representation of black and minority ethnic people in middle and senior management, in business and leadership positions across all sectors; discriminatory immigration and asylum policies; rhetoric that fuels the increase in extreme right wing politics; and racist violence.

Among many other non-governmental organizations, CCRJ, a commission of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), has sought over this period to address these issues: through education, policy analyses, advocacy, solidarity, campaigns and the provision of financial support to small groups and larger national organizations for capacity building. Despite these efforts, however, visible minorities remain largely dis-empowered, and suffer both subtle and overt forms of racial injustice.

It was suggested by the Commission that, in view of the historic struggle for justice and equality in the United States, there might be much for us to learn from the long experience of American Churches and institutions in addressing issues of racism, justice and empowerment. CCRJ therefore organized a fact-finding visit to institutions and communities in a number of American states. A delegation of twelve church leaders and racial justice officers travelled throughout May 3-17 2005 to Washington DC, Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, and New York. *Beneath the Surface* is the result of this adventure.

Beneath the Surface presents the delegation's findings about race relations in five short chapters:

- Chapter One is a reflection based on events which took place after our visit. When writing this report, it proved impossible to proceed to set out the issues without taking account of the devastating revelations particularly in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, and the horrible conditions in which people in the South existed and many are still living.
- Chapter Two highlights evidence of racism beneath the surface.
- Chapter Three provides an analysis of inequalities based on delegates' reflections and impressions.
- Chapter Four includes individual stories told from the Southern perspective.
- Chapter Five reflects on theology and practical activism, using reports on discussions in Chicago and New York. These chapters also contain examples of good practice.
- The report incorporates impressions of members of the delegation using their own words in Appendix A, and suggestions for further reading in Appendix C.

The information and reflections set out in this report are intended to provide insights into the extent to which racial justice issues are addressed, and the experiences of the delegation. It includes suggested models of good practice that could be used in the churches' work on race in these islands.

1. The Katrina Revelations

Very often it is assumed in the UK that American society is culturally inclusive and ethnically at peace with itself because of the well-known work done during the Civil Rights Movement. Moreover, the popular media, the portrayal of African Americans in the mainstream, and the existence of African American businesses and institutions, often support this opinion.

Hurricane Katrina, which pulverized much of the USA's Gulf coast, decisively undermined the notion of great prosperity, and cruelly exposed what appeared to be one of America's most telling ironies: the presence of abject poverty and ingrained racism lurking just beneath the surface of the world's richest 'super power'.

The images and column inches of absolutely desperate African Americans, who make up, for example, 65% of the devastated population of New Orleans, ravaged by Katrina, showed gross indignities often reserved for underdeveloped and desperately poor countries. The horrific scenes of floating bodies - black ones - the lack of food, drinking water and other necessities for basic survival, all echoed in people's unmistakable cries for just dealings. Given that there was ample warning about the nature of the threat Katrina posed, it is almost unimaginable that preparations for evacuation of the large numbers of people without their own transport, (35% blacks had no vehicles against 15% whites) would have been so inept and apparently careless had the disaster headed for a largely white area. Indeed, the painfully slow and inadequate response by the Federal authorities many days after the event also revealed astonishing structural failures.

It soon became clear that the problem loomed large when funding for the New Orleans levees had been slashed by more than half over four years previous to the hurricane. The poor and dispossessed people of this vulnerable district, and indeed other parts of the South, were largely let down for the same reasons and in the same circumstances that the poorest and most exploited people in the under-developed world are failed: poverty, neglect, powerlessness and deprivation which result from institutional racism. Institutional discrimination remains a key feature of the underside of American political and social history. Dr Cornel West, professor of African American Studies and Religion at Princeton University, recognized this reality when he remarked: 'They shot brother Martin dead like a dog in 1968 when the mobilization of the black poor was just getting started. At least one of his surviving legacies was the quadrupling in the size of the black middle class. But Oprah [Winfrey] the billionaire and the black judges and chief executives and movie stars do not mean equality or even equality of opportunity yet. Black faces in high places do not mean racism is over' (Sunday, 11 September 05, Guardian Newspaper).

Though we would wish to resist the temptation to generalize, it is hard to avoid the conviction that many sectors of American society, including the Federal and State Governments, corporate and private enterprise, and the religious community appear to have become blasé about deep-seated inequalities between African Americans and white people. There are signals that people and systems are enveloped in a malaise in which the idea of the American dream has been pushed to its most dangerous limits for many: a Darwinian tenet of the survival of the fittest. It is true to say that what hurricane Katrina revealed was not entirely surprising to the delegation; for we became much more aware of the ample evidence of racial inequalities lurking just below the surface during our visit to the South.

2. Beneath the Surface

In its two-week fact-finding visit the British and Irish delegation was challenged by the images and strong signals of segregation, racism, poverty and discrimination. The lack of a coherent debate about racism and segregation, or indeed a public outcry at such inequalities, not to mention America's apparent political and social disengagement with the nub of the question, was plainly astounding.

2.1 Poverty and racism

The visit to Selma and Birmingham, Alabama, the poorest State in the Union, highlighted four themes which appear to characterize life in the South, but also exist in many ways in the North:

i) a denial that racism exists;
ii) the need to address the economic implications of racism and discrimination in institutional structures;
iii) any interest in racial justice issues is only marginal; and
iv) segregation continues to define society.

These themes are interlinked in most cases, and are all illustrated by stories too numerous and lengthy to tell here. Yet, the consequences for America's poor and oppressed people were not difficult to detect. In discussions with the 'One Selma Group', 'Alabama Rise', and 'Mission Birmingham', it was clear that these themes figured largely and could not be overstated. The churches' work on race relations in downtown Birmingham, for example, focused largely on the issues of AIDS and poverty outside Alabama. Concentration on AIDS and poverty in Birmingham was clearly important and well understood, but it was also obvious that for this group at least, the colonial methodology of 'doing things on behalf of', rather than 'empowering' disadvantaged people by addressing or engaging them in the discourse on racism, was preferred. (Racism is often the reason why poor people do not have access to medicines). Among other groups, it was more important to meet for mutual support in ministry, whilst stressing the need for personal transformation in attitudes as a way of addressing segregation, racial inequalities and their rationalization.

The rationalization of racism came about through the use of theology which supported the economics of the slave trade. Once it was theologically acceptable, racism, as part of the pathology that used and continues to use religion embedded in race, class and gender, became hard to root out. The need to address this problem was illustrated by the fact that some Churches tended to speak about integration only in theory, but in practical terms, they remain segregated. On a single street, for example, a black Baptist Church nestles just meters from a white Baptist Church, and 'never the twain shall meet'. Despite recently joining together for a unity service, however, these and other congregations tend to be segregated by choice. Dr King had noted during the Civil Rights struggle: 'The most segregated hour in the USA is Sunday morning at 11.00am'.

Institutional racism and segregation are features that continue to define society, and are characterized by poverty and racism; these are illustrated by great disparities between different ethnic groups. We learned that healthcare in Selma is far worse for African Americans - who often cannot afford health insurance - than for white people. Access to education in these communities is based on a system of segregation in the

schools: black children attend the public schools, whilst white children attend private schools. Yet, there is no obvious wide-ranging public debate or discomfort with this situation, except in personal terms for some (see below).

The national picture, however, is not entirely without hope. In a meeting with the Rainbow Push Coalition in Chicago later in our visit, we learned about the impressive work of Advocate Healthcare (AH), a not-for-profit healthcare provider, the largest in Illinois, with more than 25,000 employees and 4,600 medical staff. AH is affiliated to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Church of Christ. Their work is based on values such as compassion, equality, excellence, partnership and stewardship, and it is an equal opportunity employer. The rate of employment of minority ethnic people in this organization increased from 21% in 1995 to 32% in 2004. AH supplies and purchases affordable health care programs for poor people, who are very often part of the church. Hurricane Katrina was devastating in her power to unmask the truth, even about religious practice.

2.2 Politicised and economically powerful faith

Perhaps the most telling development for racial justice in America both in church and society is the amazing rise and influence of the so-called Religious Right, not least the 16.4 million-member Southern Baptist Convention. Church growth in America is steepest amongst evangelicals,[1] as it is also in Britain. In Washington and Chicago, the group heard reports that these financially powerful churches - typified by the leader headline in *Business Week* (Issue, May 23 05), *Evangelical America, Big Business, Explosive Politics* – appear to have strong alliances with the Bush White House.

Manifestly, a combination of mass-marketing tactics, the mainstreaming of popular objections to abortion and same sex marriage - which largely determined the outcome of the 2004 general elections - and President Bush's expressed evangelical heritage, seem to be at the heart of this 'partnership' between the White House and the said churches. Whilst the evolving alliance could be a positive and productive development – the Christian voice for justice and truth should always be heard prophetically in mainstream politics – and George Bush may not overtly make the claim, there appears to be a wide regard of him as 'the man sent by God to remove this evil', particularly since 9/11. This emphasis has become even more prominent and perhaps alarming, as the so-called 'war on terror' appears also to have hardened America's political and religious heart. The Religious Right ironically seems to have assumed the ground once occupied by the Religious Left, putting their theology of God's action in the world at the heart of politics and power on Capitol Hill.

It is just possible, however, that the Religious Right has gained positions of real influence with the political right. Sources indicate that 40 US senators were given a 100% approval rating by James Dobson's research council, a leading organization with a Focus on the Family; 5 were given an 80% approval rating. Here, a significant minority has seized power, and dominates 17 states.[2] It is believed that this section of Christendom

1 Mainstream Protestants, like the United Methodists Church and the Episcopal Church, have declined by more than one million in the past ten years and now stand at 16% of the American population. Evangelicals have increased from 13% in 1980 to 36% in 2004, 10% of these being African American. 22% of the American poulation is Catholic (*Business Week*, May 23 05).

2 Historically, the political and business elite have been mainstream Protestant, but today President George W. Bush and more than a dozen members of Congress, including House Speaker Dennis Hastert, are evangelicals. (*Business Week*, May 23 05).

tried to expand the base of the Republican Party using 'God talk' and regular breakfast meetings with key political figures at the White House. It became apparent, somewhat disturbingly perhaps, that the Religious Right and the political Conservatives are characterised by the attitude, in economic terms, that 'you deserve what you get, and if you don't have, you didn't deserve it'. The casualties of this Darwinist philosophy in the American context include the desperately poor who died, and the dispossessed who struggled to survive, during and after hurricane Katrina. Katrina brought their plight to light.

Moreover, it was apparent that the powerful influence of the Religious Right is extending in to certain black Church traditions in America. The Religious Right has seized an opportunity to increase its power by adopting poorer black churches through pouring money into help them. In any social or religious context, financial power could be utilized for the benefit of poor and marginalized people, but it often has the effect of shutting off residual energy and any prospect of raising new strident voices in the discourse on racial justice. 'God talk trumps political expediency'. At the height of the Civil Rights Movement black Churches and church agencies in the South in particular stood at the forefront of political action for justice and equality. It appears that they are almost silent on the issue today, except for some outstanding enduring examples, like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Rainbow Push Coalition. Many of the growing mainly African American churches either have adopted or are being adopted into the methods of the economically powerful Right. Whilst the multi-million dollar World Changers Church International espouses a mantra of 'prosperity', the great majority of African American churches remain modestly socially engaged.

Many are convinced that the Political and Religious Right have 'hijacked' God; they have 'stolen his Bible and his faith'[3], and are perpetuating a cultural sin. It may be claimed, furthermore, that, where the black mega churches are adopting mass-marketing tactics, a form of neo-colonialism could be emerging. It could also be claimed that the mega churches are, however, reaching millions for God. We know that in the USA approximately 75% of the population is affiliated to the Christian faith; but large numbers remain poor despite these churches' emphasis on prosperity as a kind of recompense for faithfulness. The overwhelming majority of people go to church, but polite conversation and limited prosperity can also blunt or remove the challenge of change for poor, marginalized and oppressed people.

While mass-marketing methods could give more people access to the Christian faith, its contemporary emphases on prosperity narrowly interpreted in terms of material well-being could be construed as detrimental to sustainable expansion of the Christian Gospel. Such expression could give raise to false hopes and further deprive the very people it seeks to lift up from their misery. Moreover, the mega church and Religious Right can render some the victims of perpetual handouts. On the other hand, many churches, including some powerful African American-led congregations like the Potters House, responded admirably, to the desperation in the wake of Katrina.

Reflection on the work done with particular institutions, groups, and individuals follows. It is based on or includes impressions provided by members of the delegation, and highlights examples of good practice. Academia has always played a critical role in analysing and raising awareness of the issues, and the work of the University of Georgetown in Washington DC is no exception.

3 Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It,* Harper Collins, (New York: 2005).

3. Refelections and Impressions

3.1 Washington DC - Race in education

A series of short informative encounters with the Catholic University of Georgetown, Washington DC, arranged and facilitated by lecturer Professor Dr Diana Hayes, revealed a multi-ethnic student body from different religious backgrounds. Georgetown is the only Catholic institution, for example, to have an Imam in residence, and is also the first to have a resident Rabbi. The religious needs of its 6,500 undergraduates are catered for through the Directorate of Campus Ministry. Georgetown also has to grapple with the reality of racial justice issues within.

It is almost inevitable that such a diverse student body would create the possibility for racial and religious tension. There have been tensions and incidents of racial and religious disharmony, particularly following the attacks on the USA in September 2001. These included death threats to African Americans who dated white women, and threats to Muslims following 9/11. Clearly, however, the way in which these incidents on campus were dealt with ultimately united the campus community and brought people closer. The Campus Ministry openly stood against these threats through its International Relations Programme. For Georgetown, 'race' as such is understood as a social construct outside of which white people place themselves. The faculty does not reflect this diversity, however, and only 1 of its 39 members is black. Nonetheless, Georgetown was conscious of the need to move towards a policy of greater diversity among the faculty, and a process is in place.

Good practice

Georgetown plays a key role in enabling poor black children to enter and make progress at school in order to have a pool from which to draw for university. Beyond this, a centre for non-profile leadership, a training mechanism that creates safe spaces in which difficult conversations could take place, has emerged. 40% of each class under this scheme are black, and faculty coaches provide support after the course finishes.

We learned of an underlying attitude, however, that suggests African American and Latino students are 'uneducable'. But this viewpoint has a long history: it is consistent with the eighteenth century pseudo-scientific myth that black people were inferior, which was used to justify the transatlantic slave trade and racism. It is also central to systems of apartheid, and is a stereotype which pervades modern manifestations of racism and forms of enslavement. Such attitudes reflect a pathology which provided the justification to dehumanize. Georgetown's Centre for Social Justice, Research, Teaching, and Service, however, believes that 'tomorrow's "whole person" cannot be whole without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world.' Segregation on campus remains an issue, but Georgetown, a Catholic and Jesuit student-centered institution, focuses on social justice while promoting inter-faith understanding; here, religion provides a basis for integration.

4 See David Hume, *On National Characters*,1753.
5 http://socialjustice.georgetown.edu/faculty/index.html

Moreover, the centre proactively addresses community need through its involvement, for example, in the provision of community-based[6] social justice education and large housing projects around which an Intern Programme has been developed.[7]

Good practice
A Georgetown project, FAITHWORKS, as it is called, provides houses for low-income families, helped by community-based research that assists with breaking down barriers, and delivering justice through training and the teaching service. There is also work with parents through a programme called the 'Primary Care Giver'. Books and newsletters are given freely, and students work with communities in their contexts, as students and faculty maintain a keen awareness of serious inequities in American society.

3.2 Inequalities in voting rights

The Committee on Religion and Race in the United Methodist Church, amongst others, has expressed deep ongoing concern that, under the Voting Rights Act of 1965, black people's right to vote has to be renewed every twenty years in order to stop States disenfranchising voters.[8] Americans do not have the right to vote in their Constitution; Congress does not have the authority constitutionally to establish a single voting system. Voting in the USA is a 'State right', and there are 50 States, with 3,067 Counties, and 13,000 different jurisdictions, all separate and unequal. The Reverend Jesse Jackson has remarked:

> The Voting Rights Act signed in August 1965 by President Johnson is one of the nation's most important civil and human rights victories leading to political empowerment and voter enfranchisement. But today, the Voting Rights Act is threatened. Key provisions will expire in August 2007 unless Congress acts to reauthorize them. Efforts are already underway to undermine or eliminate the Act by proposing that it become 'permanent' or 'nationwide'. While sounding good, this will make the Voting Rights Act vulnerable to challenge by those who want to undermine it.[9]

It would take *only* a constitutional amendment to give every American an individual affirmative citizenship right to vote. According to a joint study by Cal-Tech and MIT, somewhere between four and six million votes were not counted in 2000 because many States had problems similar to those which occurred in Florida. A State right is not an American citizenship right, but a right defined and protected by each State - and limited to that State.

6 http://socialjustice.georgetown.edu/teaching/communitybasedlearning.html
7 See Georgetown University, Centre for Social Justice Research, Teaching and Service, Mission Statement at http://social justice.georgetown.edu
8 108 of the 119 nations in the world that elect their public officials in some democratic manner have the right to vote in their Constitution - including the Afghan Constitution and the interim document in Iraq. The United States is one of the 11 that don't! The Bible says if you build a house of *sand,* when it rains, the winds blow and the storms come it will not stand. 'Our voting system is built on the sand of "states" rights.' Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.
9 http://www.keepthevotealive.org/coalition.htm

When it comes to voting, therefore, each State, county and election jurisdiction is different. The State, for example, could remove the right to vote if a person commits a felony. However, in the opinion of the UK delegation, it is an unjust system for African Americans citizens to be denied this fundamental right by a rich 'super power' which transports its mode of 'democracy' across the world.[10] It is inevitable, then, that when it comes to the question of people seeking refuge or migrant status in the USA, they are confronted not only with physical danger, but would inevitably face a form of disenfranchisement at the very least.

3.3 Migrant deaths at the border

On the US-Mexican border, where Mexicans, Haitians and others regularly seek to enter, self appointed 'minute man' vigilantes patrol the borders, unhindered, in order to stop people making the crossing. One hesitates to make a moral judgment here, but vast numbers of poor people on America's Southern borders are seeking freedom, equality and justice. Inevitably, we were told, many deaths have occurred along these borders.

An organisation called No More Deaths[11] has been campaigning for faith-based principles for immigration reform, and the overturning of unjust trade policies which often determine the need for people at the southern end to migrate in the unsafe conditions. This practice is consistent with the way in which asylum and migration issues and policies negatively affect people seeking refuge and immigrant status in many parts of the industrialised world, including the UK and Europe. The campaign for faith-based policies which No More Deaths has established is worthy of wider support, as consistent with campaigns in the UK and Europe to protect the dignity and value which all human beings share.

3.4 Poverty, Christianity and politics

In Washington, Sojourners, the organisation of which Jim Wallace is founder and director, forges connectivity between issues of poverty, Christianity and politics. Their distinctive contribution lies in their ability, according to staff, to 'say what people are thinking but cannot say' in politics and the church, and to bring leaders from across a wide spectrum of religious and political interests together, without the limitations territorial agendas often impose. In our conversation with them, they confirmed that racial justice issues were largely ignored in the States because middle class America does not wish to engage the debate. During the Civil Rights Movement, emphasis was on political, economic and civil rights in terms of race; but the danger was fatally illustrated when Dr Martin Luther King was murdered because he sought to merge economic and racial justice issues.

Quite apart from race, Sojourner's priority is their concern with poverty reduction.

10 The delegation raised the question as to how the UK could help to promote the permanent voting rights campaign, but any action short of a constitutional amendment to project the right is fraught with difficulties as noted above.

11 *No More Deaths* endorses Faith-Based Principles for Immigration Reform: Recognition that the current Border Enforcement Policy is a failed policy; the status of undocumented persons currently living in the U.S. must be addressed; the family unity and reunification should be the cornerstone of the US immigration system; workers and their families should be allowed to enter the U.S. to live and work in a safe, legal, orderly, and humane manner through an Employment-Focused immigration program; and recognition of the root causes of migration in environmental, economic, and trade inequities.

This is being addressed primarily in its campaign to urge the restoration of Federal budget cuts in food stamps, for example, which have clearly increased poverty and housing needs. Little time is left, therefore, for addressing specific race issues in their programmes. Using the tools of education and applied theology, this non-governmental organization seeks to persuade politicians on Capitol Hill of the need to frame budgets as moral covenants. Sojourners challenges the Religious Right by seeking to build a broader based movement, but conceded that the Religious Right has been much better organised and more disciplined.

3.5 Inter-faith and race

The practical challenges and opportunities the interface between inter-faith and racial justice issues presents were the subject of a seminar at the Interfaith Council in Washington DC. We learned that the Council was the first in the USA to get Muslims and Protestants working together. With over 800 interfaith organisations in the USA, the Council works for respect, not tolerance. Overcoming racism is one of its objectives. There is a focus on reparation, reconciliation and renewal, but the Council is aware that racism cannot be overcome except spiritually, because, they acknowledged, it is difficult to break the denial.

The Council concentrates, among other things, on three interesting projects: i) They lodge a legal suit to change the name of the American football team, Washington 'Red Skins', which is seen as a derogatory comment on native Americans. The case was pending at the time of our visit. ii) They are working on a Bill about soldiers who object to going to war, a case which has Senate and House of Representative support. iii) The Council was seeking to create a racial justice network comprising other faith groups. The Council was clear about the challenges that resonate around the fact that, once racism was made theologically acceptable, it was hard to remove. Religion is embedded in race, class and gender.

The focus here in the not-so-deep South and all over the North was more rational and policy oriented. The South provided a very different experience. The emphasis was much more on grass-roots activities and living experiences than the more socio-political and theological analyses. The South therefore proved quite painful in some cases.

4. Stories from the South

'In the North, they love the people but hate the individual. In the South, they love the individual but hate the people.' [12]

In this section, I will provide some reflection, using a selection of the stories and insights from the Roundtable meetings, commencing with arrival in Alabama.

4.1 Alabama – The Montgomery encounter

As the delegation joined its hosts on the first evening in Alabama, the group got a foretaste of many of the contrasts we would experience during our visit to the South. Welcomed with genuine warmth, generous hospitality and copious delicious food, the group heard real concerns for the issues of racial justice from hosts and guides, the horrors of past injustices, and the need to find new ways for black and white people to live together in equality and trust. However, the pleasantly comfortable circumstances of our stay in Alabama often created a feeling of dislocation and unease amongst our group when this was contrasted with the situations witnessed or heard about, many of which provoked sadness and tears. The group was aware of the fact that, despite our empathy and concern, we (and indeed our hosts) were outside the reality of the continuing segregation and relative powerlessness of the black community.

The South provided images and moving stories of deep segregation and racism which were still alive, but often receiving minimal attention from either black or white people. Members of the delegation were painfully reminded of some of their own stories. But apart from that voiced by members of the delegation and some of our guides, we did not encounter any anger or significant expression of frustration with the situation amongst the people we met.

However, meeting and hearing the first hand experiences of the Civil Rights struggles and triumphs from 'Johnny' Carr, a 92-year-old female friend of Rosa Parks,[13] who worked alongside her in the Civil Rights movement, was especially moving. Sheyann Webb-Christburg, who had been a teenager at the time of the struggle, and some of whose story is contained in the film *'Selma, Lord, Selma'*, provided immense interest by sharing her story and providing historical information.

After the first evening in Montgomery, the delegation split into two groups, one went to Birmingham and the other to Selma. Selma contains some stark examples of the contrasts and struggles which continue to exist in the South, hence the extended attention it receives in the context of this paper.

4.2 Selma

On the way to Selma the group called at Haynesville in Lowndes County, 'Bloody Lowndes', as it is known because of the violence which was experienced during the Civil Rights campaign. Our guide, an African American woman who worked on the County School Board, showed us the monument to John Daniels, a white Civil Rights activist who was murdered by the local deputy sheriff after he had been released from gaol.[14]

12 The Martin Luther King Jn., Exhibition, Auburn Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia. Also quoted by a member of St Paul's Episcopal Church, Selma.
13 Roas Parks died in November 2005.
14 This story has been told in Alan Parker's film *'Selma, Lord, Selma'.*

An all-white jury later acquitted the murderer.[15] Having heard something of the story the previous evening in Montgomery, and then standing in the place, the group was powerfully reminded of the reality of race hate.

Standing by the monument, we learned from Chairman of the County Commission, Charlie Keen that, of a population of 13,000, 75% were black (he is also black). However, both he and our guide confirmed that there was no significant shift in power, and certainly no movement in the ownership of wealth – though black people now held positions on the councils and boards. The land was still owned primarily by white people, and where the economy was formerly based on farming, slavery and cotton, it was now timber and farming. However, it was mainly a dormitory town from which people travelled elsewhere for work.

Once again, there appeared to be little desire amongst black or white people in the area to think about the struggle and the issues of racism, impoverishment and power. The general attitude was that 'that was then, this is now', and people wanted to move on and not think about these issues.

It appeared that any interest in the history of the Civil Rights movement came from outside the county. People visit on pilgrimages, or for study, but local people were not generally involved. The Local Historical Society in Haynesville was currently working on the history of the area, for example, but the Society was all white. Moreover, it stipulated that the research report should not contain anything derogatory about the history of the area. In essence, this means that the true story could be sacrificed for cozy politeness. Members of our group were disturbed by the apparently unreconstructed nature of the people we met and their resignation in the face of injustice.

In Selma itself, the delegation encountered another approach, when they met Mayor James Perkins.

4.3 The Selma Plan

The first black Mayor of Selma, James Perkins, explained the philosophy and theology behind the passive acceptance of segregation. Selma has a rich history in matters of race and race relations. In April 1865 one of the last significant Civil War battles took place in Selma, and buildings were burned to the ground. There are still remnants of that battle in and around the town. One hundred years later there was the Bloody Sunday March for voting rights in 1965: two 'ground zero' experiences in this town within 100 years, related to race. Former slaves built many of the buildings in the town.

Then, in August 2000, the people of Selma voted for a new mayor. One candidate had served as mayor since 1965, and the other was James Perkins. Perkins, born in 1953, was by 1965 a seasoned protester in the youth movement in Selma like many of his peers. He was involved in the voting rights movement, and the success of this had been very significant to them. There were 40,000 African Americans in this area, a number of whom were elected to office as a result of this struggle.

15 On June 2005, 79 year old Edgar Ray Killen was convicted of manslaughter for the 1964 killing of civil rights workers James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. Killen, a thirty-eight-year-old, ordained baptist minister, was the point man in the conspiracy to murder three civil rights workers in Neshoba County, Mississippi on June 21, 1964. The court heard that it was Killen ("the Preacher") whom Deputy Sheriff Price contacted that Sunday afternoon to get word out to local klansmen that he was 'holding for their later disposal three men, including Mickey Schwerner, the much despised "Goatee".

Mr Perkins said that it would have been easy to base their lives on revenge and retaliation, but they had instead embraced reconciliation and fairness over favouritism. Selma initiated its own version of a 'truth and reconciliation' process. Of course, the situation was different from South Africa but the name 'truth and reconciliation' was used because the struggle was similar: racism, which has a long history, and still exists in many religions and societies.

With regard to individual reconciliation, Mr Perkins remarked: 'The old prophets couldn't fix it; Jesus addressed it – and it's still here. I asked myself, "what made me think James Perkins could fix it? It will go on being around. So it's more important to focus on how my value system and behaviour relates to my behaviour with others"'. This approach is called 'interpersonal reconciliation'. He argues that there is a spiritual as well as a material value system in society, and neither could be ignored, but people must apply the spiritual value system to their past actions. If people's behaviour were consistent with a spiritual value system, then relationships would change and improve. The Mayor therefore concluded that, in the search for peace in his situation he could only control how he *himself* must respond.

The concept of interpersonal reconciliation had become a community project, in which a core of trained individuals is developing a comprehensive plan for their future: The Selma Plan. This would address education, and community and economic development. It was hoped that through training, conflict resolution, and giving greater prominence to these issues, the shackles would be loosened and the apparent malaise defeated. The Mayor reflected:

> The idea of a Christian who was also a racist was insanity. The biggest challenges were for groups like us. We needed to get our own people to look at how we treated each other, rather than looking always at how well or badly we were treated ourselves. Those people who treat others well might find this concept difficult – they want favouritism and recognition. But we needed to deal with this. One person can make a difference.

If interpersonal reconciliation was the way forward, however, it was reasonable to ask how long people should have to wait before the situation visibly changed, given that forty years had passed since the Civil Rights struggle. Indeed, since the Selma Plan presupposed a faith-based value system, it was important to understand how it addressed people with no faith. Mr Perkins thought that, with a deeply entrenched system in place, there has been real stagnation since the Civil Rights battles, and people were afraid of movement. Once they became comfortable in their situation, it was difficult to get them to embrace change. The Mayor remarked:

> In relation to the question about the 'faith based' nature of the Plan, many who had no faith still understood the concept of the 'Golden Rule'. 'Put God first, treat people right', and others may just accept the idea of treating people right.

Since about 90% of Selma is Christian, conflict about the faith value system was thought to be minimal. The Selma Plan was not set up directly on the basis of religion, however, because the Government supported it. The delegation understood very well the need for fundamental rights and freedoms and systems of justice to be embedded in law, rather than the precarious practice of leaving it to the vicissitudes of personal goodwill.

The Mayor had grown up with Jim Crow laws, and had vivid memories of Klan activities.

> I had not been allowed to try on shoes in shoe shops, or buy drinks in the stores; black men had not been allowed to look at white women. Things had changed - there was mandatory desegregation after the 60s. But the only time I had been able to deal with these experiences and make progress in my life was when I became willing to let go of the bitterness of history. Only at that time had I felt fit for public service. I am not saying that this was the only way forward for everyone, but it was what I had had to do.

Time was of the essence, however, and it was vital not to wait until the Plan was completed. In the five years since coming to power in 2000, Mayor Perkins saw unemployment decrease in from 15% to 8%, though the community is still resistant to change. The original theme of the Selma Plan, 'Moving forward united' had to give way to 'Faith over Fear' in order to address the fear of both the oppressed and the oppressors. The only tool that could conquer this, the Mayor thought, was Faith.

Fear associated with the Plan was illustrated by the fact that only 200 people across the communities signed up for it – 60% black and 40% white.[16] Convinced that the laws had failed, governments and institutions had failed, and that the Church had failed, Mayor Perkins was now relying solely on individual effort to address racism.

> In a fight, only the person winning could stop the fight. The looser could stop fighting, but couldn't stop the fight. I am the victor at the moment, and have the chance to stop the fight. There may still be people trying to fight me, but I could choose not to fight back. It is not easy, but that was the way Jesus said we had to behave. Those who have risen from the ashes of oppression and can stand and take what they believe in could use it to bring reconciliation and progress.

4.4 Greensboro

The two groups rejoined at Greensboro, the hometown and church of Fletcher and Judith Comer, the Episcopal priest and his wife who had arranged and facilitated our visits in Alabama. We found examples there of important work to address racism and poverty.

Good practice

The Hale Empowerment Resource Organisation (HERO)

The delegation heard about HERO, a local organisation whose purpose was to empower the families of Hale County, to provide a neutral space where different communities could meet and communicate, and to create environments which would meet the communties' needs. One aspect of this work was 'Habitat for Humanity', an architectural project set up by the Auburn School of Architecture. Students learn skills by designing and building in consultation and co-operation with the community - providing housing and building improvements for the poorest members of the community.

16 One of our group said: 'At breakfast I spoke to a guy called "Dusty" Brown who was very excited about our visit and wanted to share his experience of a programme called *Hope in the Cities* which had originated in Richmond, Virginia. It was a programme of honest and open discussion and exploration between white and black people on issues of "race, reconciliation and reponsibility". He was keen to introduce it more widely in Selma. However, when I mentioned this to other church members and asked if they were interested in developing this, they explained that Dusty's views weren't necessarily the same as everyone else's'.

Partnership

The weekly meeting of the Greensboro Bi-racial Group of local pastors represented a similar methodology to the interpersonal reconciliation model found at Selma. With a history of division along the lines of race in church and society Greensboro was making efforts to overcome the problem of segregation. This group found value in these meetings which enables them to break down barriers and understand better the problems of their communities while speaking freely and with trust. Attempts to worship together whenever possible were cautious only because there were many different ecclesiologies and styles. The dialogue meant progression, and had enabled black and white communities to work together to elect a representative to the legislature.

Overcoming racism and segregation demands mutual understanding and trust in any context. Though co-operation meant more openness, trust was still a major issue. Black people still found it difficult to trust white people because they were aware of the impact of segregationist and racist actions in the past. The Bi-racial group was also aware that progress in the South hinged on developing inter-personal relationships, which heightened the role church communities had to play.

Good practice

Greensboro grassroots projects

The Churches bi-racial group reported that, on the basis that Christ was interested in people's spiritual and physical welfare, the church community was joining with the Habitat for Humanity project in providing funds to help one of the poorest families build a home. This projrct also attracted Government funding, and Greensboro was establishing a charter for 'Habitat for Humanity' in which they hoped to carry out 12 housing projects per year.

Poverty and race often combined to create and sustain racist stereotypes or discriminatory outcomes. In Alabama, the poorest State in the Union, equality of access did not mean resources are equally shared. Oil revenues from the Gulf and local taxes, which differ from area to area, provided resources for Alabama. But cuts in these resources impacted poorer communities more severely as the percentage reduction was the same across the board. The poorer the county, the lower the quality of education and other public services. Insufficient resources also restricted the integration of schools and the delicate act of balancing their ethnic make-up.

4.5 King and the Safe House

Whilst in Greensboro, the delegation visited the Safe House Museum and spoke with 68 year-old Civil Rights worker, Theresa Burroughs, a Methodist. The stories she told included the history of the Safe House, which was connected directly with a speaking engagement Dr King had in the town in 1965. The Ku Klux Klan, determined to kill King as he left the town, knew his whereabouts, and parked their convoy of cars on the highway in wait. The only other road out of town was also dangerous because they had burned down St Matthew's Church on that route. Dr King was taken that night to Theresa's mother's home and nonchalantly slept there in safety. The men protecting it positioned themselves around the house. As they waited in silence, the Klan, fully hooded, drove slowly past in a bumper-to-bumper procession of about 50 cars. The car headlights were off and the internal lights on to show their guns for maximum intimidation.

The Klan did not see the 'guards' because they were black and stood in the darkness; but the silent guards were terrifyingly aware of the threat. Theresa remarked that had they been seen, there would have been a battle and many deaths. The house is

now a museum called the Safe House, of which she is curator.

Theresa recalled the story of a picket outside white-owned businesses that refused to employ black workers. The slogan 'No hire, no buy', conveyed the message that if they weren't employed, then black people couldn't shop. As the black community marched and picketed, the big dogs of one of the local white men approached them, which frightened the young Theresa. But her braver cousin gave the dogs her lunch of sausages; the dogs then happily tagged along with the march all day. Her cousin hung protest placards round the dogs' necks, much to the fury of their owner.

Silence in the face of racism was often the easy option for white neighbours. But sometimes, realisation brought repentance. Movingly, Theresa told the story of a young white man who had stood by in 1964 and watched while his mother was persuaded by her white neighbours to sack their black maid simply because she was black. Forty years later he had written a long letter of apology, which he'd asked Theresa to pass on to the family. He had come to understand that silence in the face of oppression was enough to allow evil to flourish. Theresa had taken the letter to the local newspaper, with the man's permission, but they had refused to publish it.[17]

4.6 Georgia – The Oakhurst experience

The delegation relaxed on a visit to the King Centre for Non-violent Social Change, and heard a lecture on the history, causes and effects of racism from Dr Lawrence Carter, Director of the King Memorial Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta.

Prior to this, the group had stayed two nights with members of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in a suburb of Atlanta. Oakhurst is a good example of an ethnically integrated congregation in which ministerial responsibilities were shared among all its members. It is an effective model of what effective integrated leadership could achieve in addressing racism and social exclusion in the life of the Church. Oakhurst seem to have included, and opened up opportunities to, all adherents regardless of their colour, ethnicity or gender. Another challenge, however, seemed to be emerging. Young white professional people were progressively occupying property in this area, as a result of which there was some concern that this would change the demographics of the church, with the danger that if the balance moved too far in the direction of a white majority, the church would eventually become all white.

The general approach in the South, insofar as there was a desire for progress, was very much based upon and directed towards building good interpersonal relationships, with some emphasis on interaction between different groups.[18] There seemed to be little commitment for another fight to address structural racism or the problems of power, but equally there was a desire not to be restricted by the past. Having said that, we heard from our white hosts about a group of African American activists in Selma who were 'determined to drive out white folk' and who, according to them, had been instrumental in threatening white teachers and students in an integrated school. They felt they had to leave and go to private school! It is possible that some who wanted structural change may not be content with the interpersonal approach of the South.

17 Our local guide proposed to organize a community forum amongst the churches for those who were willing to tell the truth about what they had done during those years, and to find some way of healing. The pastors of the community could have a key role to play in helping this to take place. The letter is at Appendix B.

18 Mission Birmingham, Greensboro Bi-racial Group.

5. Theology and Practical Activism in the North

5.1 Chicago - Crossroads methodology

Of all the organisations visited, many of the group felt that this was the one which most clearly addressed issues of structural racism.

The Centre runs training programmes designed to help secular and religious organisations address institutional and historic racism. Their main aim is to transform the target organisation from within, achieved through a commitment from managers and staff of that organisation to pursue a structured long-term programme of training. The organisation or church would then have the responsibility to train its entire staff, and to monitor the programme.

This methodology addresses the issue longer term, and commended itself as one the delegation could replicate in the UK Churches across the four nations. Crossroads addressed the issues on theological, practical, political and social levels. The intensive approach to transformation meant that the different elements of the training course were well researched and powerfully applied. After the challenges of the South, members of our group felt excited and hopeful about the possibilities of this project.

The work of Crossroads is essentially to train teams within institutions for over 20 years, assisting them in analysing racism and developing strategies to dismantle it within their structures. They have developed a process for building effective teams:

Good practice

The Crossroads training programme is a PROCESS which is usually over 18-24 months, or longer in some cases.

Skills teams develop

- Analysis of systemic racism – building and sharing common understanding of racism
- Researching and evaluating – creating an ability to identify and analyse racism in a specific context, and access change
- Teaching – developing an ability to educate about racism, providing local leaders with tools for elimination
- Organizing – developing an ability to implement strategies for change

5.2 Christian Reformed Church (CRC)

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, we learned that the CRC locates itself politically at the centre in terms of the Religious Right and Left; they are evangelical mainstream. The Church was founded as an offshoot of the Reform Church of America, and was the oldest protestant denomination in the USA. Its roots were in the Netherlands and the protestant reformation; their theology is neo-Calvinist. CRC had been a predominantly white church until around 1964, when they began to include African Americans. Since the 70s there has also been a growing Korean community, and around 15 different language groups worshipping in the church, but the CRC is still predominantly white, with only around 8% being 'non-Anglo'. The African American membership began, we were told, because a proportion of the black community were uncomfortable with the

Civil rights struggle and moved into white churches.

In 1999 the CRC used the Crossroads anti-racist training methodology. This brought new perspectives to the denomination, with the setting up of anti-racism teams who provided training. Local congregations also had teams trained which helped to identify specific institutional and systemic racism. A reassessment of the method in November 2004 concluded that, though Crossroads had helped the CRC to move forward in addressing these issues, the approach was not now progressing usefully for the whole Church. Out of 1000 churches, only 9 were on board with the initiative. The CRC concluded that the element of reconciliation was missing from the programme.[19]

At the time of our visit, the CRC, with the help of other agencies, was establishing a race relations integrating team. The new programme was based on a number of models, and included reconciliation as a feature of the process of working towards transformation. The CRC believed that the work on anti-racism was complex and needed a number of tools. They said: 'If we only had a hammer, we needed to be very sure that everything we hit was a nail'.

In practical terms some of the initiatives only went as far as encouraging the denomination to send 10-12 minority ethnic advisers to Synod each year. Other work concentrated on racism awareness and the celebration of diversity within the churches. The CRC awarded annual scholarships for work which had a race relations element.

5.3 The PUSH factor

The Rainbow Push Coalition, led by the Revd Jesse Jackson, works on issues principally related to the economic empowerment of the African American community. Prior to its weekly live TV and radio broadcast, which encourages and celebrates black enterprise, the UK group attended a meeting for black business people which provided statistical information about the share and success of black businesses, and offered vital information, support and encouragement to participants. Real progress was being made by these businesses.

The delegation learned from 'The Push' (RBC) that New York's famous Wall Street was the site of the first black slave graveyard, having been founded on the slave trade through insuring ships and their human cargo, and later by insuring slaves as the property of slave owners. Following emancipation, when companies began to insure people of colour, there were different rates and benefits for them - two different insurance tracks, turning in different profit margins. All this has had an impact on the issue of reparations, which was not always clearly understood.

The PUSH enables the black community to concentrate primarily on economic opportunities, such as access to capital, corporate power and opportunity. They run the Wall Street Project, for example, which focuses on the banking and finance industry, and conferences which bring African Americans into contact with major business entities in order to transact business at the highest levels. The issue of voting rights is also being taken up again because, in 2000 and 2004, large sections of the black community neglected the system or were disenfranchised by default.

19 The CRC dissolved their relationship with Crossroads, and were now working to develop something out of the elements of that training which also included reconciliation. It was felt that the Crossroads approach concentrated on the recognition and confrontation of sin (which was necessary), but did not see reconciliation as a goal which had to go hand in hand. Within their programme this was seen as a watering down approach.

5.4 New York - Contextual reading of Scripture

After arriving in New York, the last stop before returning to these islands, the delegation participated in a stimulating theological debate organized and hosted by the United Methodist Church (UMC) and Union Theological Seminary (UTS). Specialists included Seminary lecturers and students. A brief summary of the three main presentations based on specific questions to the experts follows:

Questions

- What is our biblical and theological task in dealing with issues of racial justice?
- How have our seminaries and churches been applying this as we live out our theology in the world?
- How have we as the Church, struggled with racism in our own midst?

Summary of seminar outcomes

The discussion proceeded on the premise that racism was a function of power. All people experienced ethnocentrism, i.e., being part of a people group. Groups could engage in the process of out-grouping the other, creating an 'us and them' syndrome. Problems arose when one group had dominant power over all the others. Consequently there were several types of racism: *Bigotry* - expressed often in terms of hatred. In the USA, black people were counted as 3/5 of a person. This was a sin against the person and against God. *Institutional Racism* existed particularly in the Southern states, but also throughout the USA. Even though the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution declared the end of discrimination on the basis of race, this had continued. The black/white problem was what defined racism most clearly, and the Jim Crow Law was clear evidence of structural racism.

The USA had tried to address institutional racism through affirmative action. Theologically, this was not a problem, but structural racism came out of the theory of dominance. This was manifested through the fact that, whilst there were more poor white people than black people, the percentage of black people who were poor was greater, and the percentage of rich black people was much smaller. The attitude in the USA, as has been indicated earlier, was that if people did not succeed it was their own fault. The problem of racism now needed to focus on economic discrimination, which was the residue of all the other types of discrimination.

In this context, there was a biblical task to be performed. It was about reading the Bible within the global context and competing loyalties, and within the history of colonialism. The Bible was used in expanding colonialism, based on the interpretation of some biblical texts. In missionary terms, the ethnicity of the sending nations (missionaries and colonisers) was white people carrying the Bible, who worked on the vast majority of Africa and Asia. The question was: In *reading* the Bible, how do we view those who are ethnically different from those *using* the bible?

Scholars had worked on this on the basis of the Exodus narrative. Other work had been done on the basis of the Cowboy narrative - which makes the dispossession of the Canaanite land difficult reading for African Americans. Problems also arose in the story of Sarah and Hagar - the sympathies were usually directed towards Sarah. We needed to look at strategies for reading the Bible, and how some ways of reading translated into our own ways of seeing things. We needed to reread it from the underside.

The Church treated the wound of racism too lightly - covering it with too many veneers. In 1952 the Women's Division of the UMC set out a Charter for racial justice

policies, which was only adopted by the UMC in the 80s. The Churches might look good in terms of diverse leadership, but the dynamics of power and authority, and the demographics were the same as those of economic power in society. Quite often black people were used to encourage views that promoted and sustained racism, for example, a young articulate black woman appeared on a televangelist programme saying that affirmative action was a sin.

One participant introduced the project 'Breaking the Code of Good Intentions', which focussed on how much white people worked with good intentions. There was an assumption that racism was now a matter of the past because of the Civil Rights Movement, particularly since Martin Luther King's death, was now celebrated as a memorial rather than a challenge. One of the most fundamental struggles was where white people possessed the best of intentions, without understanding or accepting the fact of internalised racism in their responses and structures. The way the Bible was read determined entry into the discussion about the uses and experiences of power, that is, 'whom we side with'.

The way the Bible was read was a major challenge for liberal theological institutions. The Bible became an intrusion because it was problematic on a number of levels. Liberals tended, therefore, to put it aside and use other tools. This put them at a disadvantage in an entrenched Christian culture. It was important to possess the capacity to use the Bible and biblical arguments in discussions on racism.

In the seminary, most students were evangelical, theologically, but were anti-Bush in terms of social responsibility. Previously, conservative theologians were also politically conservative. In the NY seminary this was not the case. While it was important that the Bible is central, it also needed to be located historically. There was a perception that most evangelicals were not Trinitarians - they had a 4th person - the Bible. We needed to show that this was not Christian. Biblical hermeneutics needed to be located in the larger political and philosophical situation; otherwise it was a foreclosed debate. We also need to look at the relationship between incremental and fundamental change.

How the Institutional Church deals with racism

In this second seminar, Church and community activists shared critical concerns and perspectives on the issues of racism. The following questions, which had been sent in for discussion provided substance and context for the discussion:

- What do you see as the critical racial justice issues facing us in the US, in our national churches and in our local NYC community?
- How is your organisation or local church responding? What organising strategies are groups using to respond?
- How have we as churches struggled with racism in our own midst?

Summary of seminar outcomes

We had seen in the South that segregation was an actual reality. In New York, representatives acknowledged that, though the church had a theoretical willingness to reach out into different communities, and to work with other denominations, this did not always show itself in practice. The vision and opportunities were still unrealized, as many of the structures in church and society supported segregation.

Multiculturalism and segregation

Congregations still needed to address how churches could balance the need for

multicultural engagement with the expectation that people would worship within their own traditions and languages. Should there be a limit on integration or not? In inner-city Columbia, South Carolina there was an important development in cross-cultural worship, but generally it was uncommon for black and white people to worship together in the South.

Progress was also curtailed by 'fatigue' amongst Anglo colleagues, often indicated by the question, 'when are we going to be able to get this right' or even, 'why are people still complaining when things have moved on?' This fatigue came from an incomplete understanding of what Jesus wants us to do. Fortunately the Women's Division of UMC keeps racial justice on the agenda as a matter of priority.

A critical issue was the conflation of multiracial representation and multiculturalism. If there was an array of cultures around the table there was a perception that power was equally shared. However, it needed to be recognized that multicultural representation was not the same as multiculturalism; racial representation was not multiculturalism. This was a crucial observation. It would be important to start a taskforce to work with all areas of church ministry to ask the question 'how are we being inclusive, in worship, pastoral care etc?' There would need to be strategies for finding representatives from different social and ethnic groups – race and class. Even churches that celebrated diversity might still not deal with issues of power, but only issues of visibility. Some people might have the power of voice because they brought the largest finance or because they were the predominant ethnic group, and this needed to be recognized and addressed.

Moreover, other issues arose when a largely white congregation that called a black minister now became a largely black congregation. The dynamics and implications of such a move could not be overestimated. There was always a struggle with diverse congregations, like the particular experience, for example, of churches sponsoring refugees, learning to accept people from different countries, and how to include and help undocumented migrants. The UMC had set up a programme called 'Justice for our Neighbours', which operated on the basis that churches could begin individually to set up clinics for migrants to access legal counsel free of charge.

5.5 Grassroots in New York

Good practice

Community Voices Heard

This activist group encouraged the involvement of local people in dealing with political structures, campaigning particularly on issues of housing and poverty, and empowering those on benefit by giving them a voice that enables participation in the arenas of power. Through their work, the authorities had been able consequently to see that the stereotype of welfare recipients was false. Through their involvement in project campaigns, members learned to take leadership responsibility. They were building self-respect and engendering respect from the authorities, making sure they were heard. This action had led to some successes in relating with New York Police Department, getting an equitable application of the law.

One of their current campaigns was the Right to Shelter. At present NYC was required to provide places for the homeless to stay (limited to 90 days), but the project was now campaigning for the right to housing. A major element of the group's work was in helping the homeless to organize themselves, and giving training to help them get into work. The project received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, the New York Foundation, the Women's Foundation, the Catholic Church.

Churches often claimed that they 'don't have that problem' i.e., poverty, homelessness, racism etc, not unlike many in Britain and Ireland. But there might be people suffering across this range of social ills, and the churches were just ignoring them. Alternatively, they might not be reaching out to those who were suffering and drawing them in; but where churches did reach out, their willingness to speak out and campaign was limited.

Youth for peace and justice

Good practice

Youth for peace and justice, a youth project in the Bronx, encouraged local youth development by providing activities, support and challenges for them. They encouraged the young people in the project to engage with issues of peace and justice, police reform, and healing the environment, This was done through encouraging discussion and providing them with an understanding of the tools of political education, spiritual formation and community development and organizing. They were working on projects related to health and nutrition, and a major project had recently seen the clearing up the local Bronx river waterfront. They were hopeful that the improvement in the physical condition of the neighbourhood would bring businesses to the area and reverse the trend of displacement in the community. Our delegates visited the waterfront area and also attended a film showing and discussion attended by some of the young people in the organization.

5.6 Striving community activism

On the final day, the group met with a wide range of community activists who were running programmes and projects for vulnerable people:

- *The Friends of Island Academy* (FIA) provided support and help for young people at risk and those who are incarcerated, with an emphasis on problems of re-entry into the community; FIA provided education and support with family breakdown, unemployment, gang violence and proliferation of gangs.
- *Coney Island Avenue Project* provided support and campaigns for people seeking asylum who were detained and facing deportation, and who experienced racist attacks in the community and harassment from the police. The project challenged the authorities in the courts and worked with politicians to change policy.

- The *Metropolitan Community, United Methodist Church*. It was clear that deprivation and community neglect differed across different areas. The Church in East Harlem was working to spotlight this issue, and considering reconnecting with the civil rights movement in its present form, e.g., as partner with Rainbow Push Coalition. They would do this by studying the movement, by joining the Push's 1000 Connected Church Community to work on an economic approach, and by entering partnerships on issues within the community, e.g., predatory lending, health, affordable medication and insurance.
- *Church Centre for the United Nations and the United Methodist Office for the UN* were working on racial inequalities which indigenous peoples and people of African descent faced. The aim was to give these groups a voice in debates at UN level.
- The *Center for Arab American Studies* (CAAS) at Dearborn, the largest community of Arab/Americans in America, was an academic centre which not only taught about Arab/Americans, but also focused on particular issues like anti-discrimination particularly since 9/11. Running a youth programme and creating dialogue, CAAS provided occasions for displays of cultural experience – music, dance, poetry etc.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this visit was to explore alternative methodologies for addressing racism and engaging the racial justice discourse in the Churches of the Britain and Ireland. It must be recognized firstly, that an important but easily ignored element of our adventure was the opportunity the trip gave us for getting to know one another, team building and developing mutual understanding.

Secondly, our expectations of greater integration and social progress in American society, based on the momentum provided by the Civil Rights Movement and mass media images of successful African Americans in the mainstream, were not realized. As hurricane Katrina showed, there is a form of social exclusion and underlying racism that is not actually recognized either by the Federal Government or many State authorities. The accepted ironies which typify critical social polarities between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', which Hurricane Katrina did so much to reveal, appear to have become norms. As in Britain and Ireland, racism can be both complex and simple; complex because it functions in systems that are themselves difficult to unravel, but simple because of its visible effects.

Thirdly, we found that the debate and strategic address of systemic racial inequalities in the USA appear to have ended, or at the very least have been muted. Both public and private analyses in terms of the discourse or the actual address of institutional racism are minimal. It seems that the absence of charismatic and passionate leadership for change, and the painful experience of the battles fought against racism have, for many Americans, effectively drawn a line beneath the protest movements. Both black and white people are content to strive toward the American Dream, regardless of the plight of the marginalized and disenfranchised. What is more disturbing is that both the political right and the liberal left, black, Asian and white, the very rich and the very poor simply seem comfortable.

Fourthly, despite the general picture of denial or lack of systematic address of racism, some Churches, educational institutions and community activists will almost certainly never accommodate an uncomfortable silence in the face of injustice, such as Katrina has unveiled. It is entirely creditable, therefore, that some sectors are obviously concerned and seek to address the issue in American society, not least through the local initiatives we encountered. As outlined above, the different methodologies for addressing the issues of racism from personal and policy perspectives all demonstrate that there is an issue with which American society must reckon. But the lack of a national political debate can be debilitating, and could mean that attempts such as those described in this report remain patchy and isolated, with little prospect of triggering widespread sustainable social change either at Federal or State levels. Yet, the importance of the work being done by groups like Crossroads, the Rainbow Push, the Refugee Service of the Church World Services, Oakhurst, and the projects in New York cannot be underestimated. Katrina should be critical in reinvigorating the debate, but only time will tell.

Fifthly, it is almost impossible to grasp the fact that, where the world's most prosperous democracy espouses and exports that brand of political and social order, America's black population still remain victims of a form of institutional racism which means that they do not possess the permanent right to vote. This system of disenfranchisement is a political conundrum, which requires immediate attention.

Finally, the hue of a theology which challenges the political and economic compartmentalization of Christendom into what is now known as the Religious Right, characterized by mega churches and the advance of churches gaining political power, poses serious questions for those who espouse and adhere to the faith of Jesus, the Christ, in modern society.

Lessons for CCRJ and the Churches in Britain and Ireland

Clearly our Churches have much to do before a truly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural church, characterized by inclusiveness and mutual respect can be assured. Nevertheless, the Churches in these islands, together with a strong non-governmental lobby, have ensured a measure of real progress against racism in all its forms. Consequently, an alliance between the Churches in Britain and Ireland and our American counterparts could produce an even stronger lobby, given the need to continue the struggle for justice, freedom and equality.

Members of the delegation, as well as recognizing the deficiencies and shortcomings of some of the systems in the USA, were also inspired and encouraged by much of what they saw. There are lessons to be learnt both from the problems, and from the examples of good practice.

We urge the Church and other NGOs in the USA to return seriously to the national discourse on racial justice, but we too must ensure that the debate is not marginalized in Britain and Ireland. The Churches have a prophetic role in their commitment to support, encourage and defend people who are everywhere marginalized. We need to work continually to renew our challenge to the status quo and to reinvigorate campaigns both which challenge racism and discrimination wherever it exists, and also which promote and develop the potential of all people who live and work in these islands.

As we have seen, there is a debate to be joined and continued on issues of Biblical understanding, such as a theology of community, welcome and identity. There are opportunities for developing new kinds of long-term training in methods of understanding and addressing institutional racism, along the lines demonstrated to us in the Crossroads model. There are new challenges for social action to encourage our diverse communities to engage with one another and with institutions such as the Church, the police, and the government. And there are discussions to be had about how we bring about genuine repentance and reconciliation for wrongs done, and enable forgiveness and a new future for our life together as one race, the human race.

This is the task to which we return, with renewed energy, enthusiasm and hope.

Appendix A

Before we left the USA, participants were asked to prepare a brief impressionistic response to their experiences of the visit. Below is a compilation of some of the issues they raised.

REVD ANTHAPURUSHA

Racism remains a reality. It is not merely skin deep, but has connotations of geography, culture, language, gender, ethnicity, value system and tradition. White supremacy is also a fact of life – to do with power and authority. Racism thrives on the complacency and silence of the majority, and the American psyche is content with the idea that they had dealt with the issue of racism when black people got the right to vote. We had hoped that the US - as a world leader and champion of the cause of democracy - would treat all people with fairness and justice. But the American Church has lost its prophetic voice and its mission to welcome and love others as themselves. I was struck by the fact of continued segregation in the churches; and by the fact that black people do not have permanent voting rights. However I was also struck by much good practice – the Churches reconciliation move in Washington, the letter of repentance received by Theresa Burroughs, the white people who have rejected racism and joined in the struggle for racial justice, and all the initiatives of organizations and individuals which we saw in each place we stayed during our visit. Dealing with personal and institutional racism needs both-Intra-racial and Inter-racial approaches, with the best practice leading to reparation-repentance-forgiveness and reconciliation

UZO AGYARE-KUMI

My general impression was that the US had not moved on significantly since the Civil Rights movement on the issue of race. Voting rights for black people are due to expire in 2007, and 11 o'clock on Sunday is still the most segregated time of the week for many churches. However, I was full of admiration for people like Theresa Burroughs who continued to remind people that the work of the Civil Rights movement was not over. I felt the pain of the struggle to keep the issue of racism from being buried. Our experience in Washington and New York was very encouraging. The issues there seemed very much like our experience in the UK and Mr Steed's study on Bible theology was fascinating. There is a need for more exploration of the Bible, finding ways of 'unlearning' these issues and finding ways of reconciliation. I had hoped to see how the US churches dealt with racism, to learn new techniques for training, to explore ways of engaging young people, to know more about the Civil Rights movement and its legacy, and to get to know more about CCRJ colleagues. I was disappointed by the visible lack of black leaders in the south. The race debate and agenda seemed to have been 'hijacked' by white people. However, we did see glimpses of real feelings from black people and the impact of racism in their lives. Overall I was struck by the lack of a co-ordinated structure between the south and north on organizing the renewal of black voting rights. What was also striking was the attitude that racism is to do with the person and if you do well to others, all is well. The use of prosperity theology clouds the real injustices that racism creates among local people; and there seemed to be a resigned acceptance of segregation among black people.

NELU BALAJ

The key issues for me were:

- the history of the civil rights movement,
- racial reconciliation in American Society
- the role the churches play in it.

I hoped to learn from the experience of American churches and society about the process of reconciliation and integration; to identify models which we could take back with us and adapt to our own situation in the UK.

I was disappointed to discover that in the South segregation seemed to be as

much a reality as in the past. Even more shocking was that many people seemed to accept segregation and see nothing wrong with it, and churches had developed a theology which saw no need for change. There appeared to be very little in terms of a movement towards reconciliation (eg. the fact that the Greensboro paper did not wish to publish an apology for racism from a white man). I was particularly struck by the theological approach in dealing with racism – through an "intra-personal" methodology. This approach was more prevalent in the 'Bible belt' area, but also occurred in churches in the north.

The experience was so intense and the organisation of the trip meant that we had to try to see as much as we could. It would have been good to have been able to spend more time in reflection and recovery.

SONIA BARRON

Having taken up post 5 days before the USA visit, this was a good induction for my work. The key issues for me were:

- Finding a workable solution to the problem of institutional racism within the Church of England
- Raising awareness and helping those in positions of influence within the Church of England to recognize and address institutional racism
- Empowering Minority Ethnic people in the Church of England for leadership at all levels

We saw some individual groups seeking to address the issue of racial injustice but for many building personal relationships was seen as the key if their Church or organization appeared to be powerless or lacking in will. In Greensboro Alabama, a biracial group of pastors dialogued and prayed together as an example to their congregations of how black and white people could work together.

Many people we met expressed fears for the future in an America which they saw as going backwards.

I had hoped to find good examples of how churches addressed racial injustice, particularly in light of the Civil Rights legacy; to learn about engaging those in key positions in the church and political decision-making; and to be encouraged and enthused in my new post. I was saddened to see the lack of real racial integration, the slow progress of change, and by the fact that legislative changes were not always reflected in the way people lived their lives. The continued acceptance of segregation in churches in Alabama and the unwillingness of many churches to talk about these important issues demonstrated this.

I was struck by the fact that black people do not have the permanent right to vote, and by the fact that most of the groups we visited had very few black people leading on the issue of racial justice. The lack of contact with many black people was noticeable.

DIONNE GRAVESANDE

My hopes of the trip had been

- to learn about various models and approaches initiated and led by the black Christian community.
- to find a motivating energy to energize us and build on our strengths
- to network and hear the stories of those who have been involved with the struggle for racial justice.

I was disappointed that the programme in the south did not give opportunities for the group to be hosted by people of colour; the southern agenda was led by well-meaning white men who genuinely wanted to help, but lacked the insight to move the racial justice agenda forward. Also disappointing was how little progress has been made since the civil rights movement; the disparity of wealth between white and black in the south and they way the Christian agenda and language can confuse the political process.

But I was left with striking memories: the story of a service of forgiveness and healing in Washington between white and black Methodists; the incredible moment of walking across the Selma bridge and all that the experience represented.

Generally, however, I found the Alabama and Selma experience profoundly painful and it will stay with me for a long time. I expected to see greater integration after the civil rights movement, but to witness how little life had moved on 40 years after the Selma march was a complete shock to my system. Though the legal framework for segregation has been

dismantled, a voluntary system continues to operate. "The most segregated hour in the USA is between 11 and 12 on a Sunday morning". For a time in the South I too, became as helpless as the people who are living and working with the legacy of the Civil Rights movement.

My experience of Washington, Chicago and New York, where there were different models and approaches to the racial justice agenda, was more positive.

NABOTH MUCHOPA

My experience is that Churches in the USA have always been involved in politics, social justice standing in solidarity with the poor. The issues at the forefront of their engagement were:

- the struggle to overcome racism and promote cohesive communities
- raising the theological and biblical dimension of racial justice
- political campaigns for a fairer and kinder society
- economic empowerment

My immediate impression was of a country uneasy with itself. The post 9/11 effects are far reaching The US also still suffers from the legacy of slavery segregation and racism.

The Black Historic Churches are involved with issues that affect Black and poor people and with economic empowerment programmes (eg. The Rev Jesse Jackson and the RainbowPUSH Coalition). The race debate is mainly about Black and White yet there are other minority ethnic groups such as Latinos, First Nations People and Asians, who also experience racism and economic injustice.

I was struck by the fact that that there are parts of the US where schools, housing and other public facilities are segregated not so much by law as by the continuing poverty among Black people.

Also by the possibility that some people may lose the right to vote if that right is not renewed.

Many Black and White people are reluctant to talk openly about racism and segregation, though in private many speak honestly about these struggles.

There is work being done by Black and White people today to build bridges of trust and friendship. Several Churches, universities, and individual people work hard to promote justice and equality.

There is however still a huge disconnect between economic justice and racial justice despite the efforts of these organisations.

I was left with the impression that but nothing has really changed, and that some places in Alabama seem to have remained in a time warp.

JAMES OZIGI

The key issues for me were

- how racism and related issues affected the African and Caribbean Churches operating in the USA *(Unfortunately it was not possible to locate African and Caribbean churches or engage with them.)*
- how ecumenism really worked in the USA.
- the progress made in the area of race relations since the civil rights movement.
- what I could learn from the American experience

One of my greatest disappointments was to discover that Black peoples' right to vote was not automatic but subject to renewal. It was a shocking discovery. I sincerely hope that the churches in the UK can draw this to the attention of the Prime Minister.

I was also disappointed to see that there wasn't any enthusiasm for facing up to the continued reality of racism, and that nothing much had changed since the 1960's. In fact I concluded that the UK was way ahead in the collaboration of the churches with regard to racism and relations.

It was good to note that much work was being done with young people especially trying to rehabilitate those who had found themselves on the wrong side of the law. The Exodus project, started by ex-offenders, for offenders coming out of detention, exemplifies this. It was notable that they, like us, have funding problems.

I was struck by the organizational efficiency of the United Methodist church and the meetings they arranged for us with a range of people. I was also impressed by the Crossroads project whose training programme offered us something we could use back home.

MARGARET PATTINSON

The key issues for me were the US response to institutional racism; the legacy of slavery; evidence of equality and integration, and evidence of a desire in the US for a wider understanding of racism beyond their borders.

The activists we met, and those working on radical theology, were not the norm in the country. Generally it seemed that white Americans wanted to believe that though things may not be perfect, they were moving in the right direction. The black people seemed resigned at best to a kind of peace which didn't involve significant movement towards integration or structural change. Building good interpersonal relationships was felt by many to be the best way forward. However, this seemed unrealistic when set against an increasingly disheartening political and religious context.

I hoped for a fresh angle on working for racial justice in the UK, but was disappointed that there was so little structural change in the US in terms of equality within the power structures – in spite of a number of high-profile black people. There was also a desire to relegate the Civil Rights experience, and the questions raised by the black power movement, into history books.

I was struck by the feeling of many that post 9/11, with the rise in influence of the religious Right and the toothlessness of the liberal left and centre, times were increasingly uncertain for black people. However, I was excited by some of the training developments and by the theological work being done.

We were all disturbed by the continued segregation – both in society and in Churches in the South.

However, for me, one thing I learnt most from was the response of the black members of our delegation to the USA experiences. As a white member of the delegation, it was salutary for me not to be part of a majority, and to see the perspective and pain of black colleagues.

JOAN RODDY

The key issues of the trip for me were

- Segregation at Church and other levels
- 40 years on, Civil Rights was far from a reality
- that it was unsatisfactory to strive for civil and political rights without including economic, social and cultural rights
- the influence of religious right in general and on Government in particular, post 9/11
- 'individualized' religion/spirituality, and the absence of a social justice perspective
- the direction' of US Govt and its influence globally and the trend towards the erosion of the rights of all people

The polarization both in interpreting the current situation as due either to 'personal' sin or to 'structural' sin, and in how Churches, groups, individuals saw their responsibility, gave rise to Churches with very different missions. In some quarters, there was tiredness with the struggle for rights and an acceptance of the status quo.

However, I was edified and inspired by individuals and groups with a vision, who continued to analyze the situation and respond creatively and with great commitment.

I would have welcomed more contact with black and minority ethnic people and with people of other faiths in order to experience and understand life from their perspective. And I was shocked to discover that the right to vote of black people was temporary, and saddened to see how divided the Christian Churches were - particularly in face of racial injustice where, potentially, they had a shared mission and where a concerted effort was so important to meet the challenge.

I was struck by the degree of segregation and exclusion and the link between ethnicity, poverty, education, health, crime, political participation and representation.

On their return from the USA, the participants prepared detailed reports of their experiences for their sponsoring church or organization.

These may be available on application to the individual organizations.

Appendix B

February 7, 2005
Teresa Burroughs 2408 Davis Street Greensboro, AL 36744-2237

Dear Ms. Burroughs;

I don't think we ever knew each other, but in all likelihood our paths probably crossed at some point many years ago. I just stumbled across a website on the Internet featuring your museum down by the depot in Greensboro. I know the area well; I grew up in Greensboro, but left in 1972. I think it's ironic that I found this page, because just the day before I had paused for a good five minutes outside the building where I work in soulful meditation over an issue that has troubled me greatly for many, many years. I know you must be an extremely busy lady, but I would be forever grateful if you could find time at some point to give this letter to a family that may still live in the Greensboro area. I would write them directly if I knew their address.

The article about you said you were arrested more than once during the demonstrations of the 1960's. I was a young teenager living in Greensboro at the time, remember it all too well, and that is why I'm writing. At that time a very kind and gentle black woman used to come to our home once a week to clean and such since Mom was working six long days a week. Her name was Dorothy Mae Bryant, and if you were taking part in the demonstrations, in all likelihood you probably knew her. If she or any of her family still remains in the area, they are whom I would like for you to pass this on to.

My early years were spent in an apartment in the old Jackson house on the corner of Demopolis Street and the bypass. Between us and the old GHS football field were the houses of several black families. Johnny Blackman and Rose were right behind us. Rose took care of Mrs. Jackson and I grew up playing with their son who I always knew as "Preacher." Later we moved, several times, and on the last move was when Dorothy Mae came in to help Mom with housework.

My best friend then was a terrific with one exception, he and his family were full of hate toward blacks. It was so rare that issue came up when we were playing that I ignored it when it infrequently happened. However, one day just after he got his driver's license (he was three years older than me), we were riding by the old V.J Elmore's store during one of the demonstrations and both of us saw Dorothy Mae waking the boycott line. He went ballistic and drove me straight back to his house to tell his parents what we'd seen. They all began putting a lot of pressure on me to have Mom take action. Quite frankly, I was young and more than just a little afraid of the way they were talking. However, that said, I know I should have taken a stand against them in support of what I knew in my heart was right, but I did not. Instead, I put pressure on Mom to let me do the cleaning and let Dorothy Mae go. She resisted, I persisted due to this peer pressure, and later Mom gave in leaving Dorothy Mae a note that she no longer needed her. That evening we found some cleaning had been done when we got home, but Dorothy Mae had obviously found the note during her cleaning, stopped, and had left us her own note. I don't remember all she said, but in essence she said that she knew that we knew she had been picketing the store, that she would always do whatever she could to help her people, and that she never thought we were the kind of people that would do what we were doing.

Mom and I were both upset that night. Mom kept saying over and over that she was not that kind of a person and she couldn't believe she had let me talk her into doing that. I was saddened Mom was, and I was so disappointed in myself for not standing up to those people and risking whatever might have happened to support what I also knew was right. No excuses here, but one thing we all know is that those were some tense and difficult times.

I would just like for the Bryant's to know that, as hard as I know it will be for them to believe, we were not hateful people - it was just the difficulty of the times, and our (my)

fear of what might happen to us. Years before, when we lived in the Demopolis Street house, I will never forget one night when we could see some kind of activity on the football field behind us.

We couldn't figure out what all the cars were doing out there that night since it wasn't football season, and it wasn't until we saw some bright light that Mom determined was a burning cross, that we knew what was happening. Not only were we terrified, but within minutes we heard a faint knock on our back door, and when we opened it there were about a 12-15 black men, women and children too terrified to even speak. Mom knew why they were there and she got them in the house. We all stayed up scared to death until about 2 AM, well after the "activity" on the football field had broken up.

As soon as I left Greensboro, I left any ill feelings I might have ever had in Hale County. When the site I worked at when we first moved to Florida got its first black employee, I helped him find his first apartment - right next door to me. Only one person in the neighborhood was upset with me for it, and my black coworker and his family quickly became the most popular family on the block. Scottie left our company years ago to become the minister of the Beulah Baptist Church in Fort Walton and is a wonderful member of the Fort Walton Beach community. When his wife needed a job, my wife talked to the personnel director of the firm she had applied to and helped her get hired. Thirty years later, she is still there doing great work for them. Later this year my company is going to open a slot for someone to work in my office for me. It will be the first time I've had any help and I'm looking forward to it. Out of the 800 employees in our company, if a certain person applies, I plan to recommend a black woman over a lot of white men that I know will apply. Doris is simply the best qualified employee, a wonderful person, and I hope she will be interested enough to inquire when it opens.

I don't say all of the above to pat myself on the back, but only to hopefully show that what happened with Dorothy Mae is something I've regretted my entire life, and I know it troubled Mom until the day she passed away also. What I did back then was so out of character that whenever it has crossed my mind over the years I just shutter and shake my head in shame. I am also ashamed that it has taken this long to apologize to the Bryant family.

So far, the only satisfaction I have received from any portion of that tragic event occurred about fifteen years ago when that old friend that put so much pressure on me back then, looked me up here in Florida and called one afternoon wanting to meet me on a trip he was planning down here to renew our friendship. He sounded so different when we were talking that I assumed during the conservation he had put that old hate behind him and moved forward, but about ten minutes into the conservation he brought up his hate for blacks and asked if I felt the same way. I had to honestly tell him, "I don't feel that way, and hope you don't plan on talking about such." Telling him in essence we no longer had a friendship made me sad - sad to realize I had been such good friends with someone that harbored so much hate, and sad for him that his hate prevented him from experiencing a entire group of people of such rich history, culture and wisdom.

So in closing, I just ask that the Bryant family might somehow find a way to accept my heartfelt apology for what happened so many years ago, and forgive me for giving into fear over what I knew was right. If unable to forgive me, I at least ask them to forgive my mother who would have never done what she did had it not been for me and my fear. I know that the fear we felt, as white people, can't begin to compare with the fear, anger, outrage, and all the other emotions that were running rampant in the black community at the time. All I can do now is to say I'm sorry, and ask that you accept my deepest apology. And thank you Ms. Burroughs, for helping me get this to them if you can.

Respectfully yours,

Appendix C

FURTHER READING

Books and other resources collected during the visit

Books

Bell, Derrick, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well:* the permanence of racism, Basic Books, (New York: 1992).

Clairborne, Liz, *What you Need to Know about Dating Violence*, A Teen's Handbook, (New York: 2000).

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Papers

The Presbyterian Church (USA), *Report of Task Force to Study Reparations*, Presbyterian Assembly, 2004. (jmaruskin@churchworldservice.org).

Church World Service, *The Bible as the Ultimate Immigration Handbook*, (2003).

Union Theological Seminary, *Christian Leadership for a Church and World in the Making*.

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