

Lancaster Theological Seminary

**Black Pastor, White Church: Using Positive Psychology as a Mission-Driven Strategy for  
Building and Sustaining Diverse Multicultural Congregations**

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by

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Black Pastor, White Church: Using Positive Psychology as a Mission-Driven Strategy

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## Abstract

### **Black Pastor, White Church: Using Positive Psychology as a Mission-Driven Strategy for Building and Sustaining Diverse Multicultural Congregations**

This research study seeks to gain more knowledge from the experiences of Black clergy who are serving in predominantly White congregations and learn from their experiences. This research will assist Black clergy and the congregations that call us to understand what is involved when calling Black clergy to serve in a predominately White congregation. In addition, this study will investigate how positive psychology<sup>1</sup> can be used when a predominately White congregation calls or desires to call a Black clergy to achieve a mission of creating a diverse multicultural congregation.

A note regarding the capitalization of Black and White in describing the people of the study. After researching this topic, the decision was made to use upper case lettering for both Black and White people. The reasoning, as will be revealed in this study, both Black and White people have an experience of race in our society. To use lower case capitalization for White people would continue the perpetuation of the idea of White folks not experiencing white as a race. As argued in the Washington Post, “Why ‘White’ Should be Capitalized, too,” for the capitalization, “We should capitalize “White” to situate “Whiteness” within the American ideology of race, within which “Black,” but not “White,” has been hypervisible as a group identity.”<sup>2</sup> It is important to this research study and the work in predominately White

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<sup>1</sup> Positive Psychology is an evidence-based science that focuses on positive emotions, identifying and building strengths and virtues to sustain a “good life. Positive psychology research has shown when individuals use their core strengths, they can successfully manage adversity and life’s difficulties.

<sup>2</sup> “Opinion | Why ‘White’ Should Be Capitalized, Too - The Washington Post,” accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/07/22/why-white-should-be-capitalized/>.

congregations, who call Black clergy to recognize there is White racial identity, as the invisibility of whiteness impacts the clergy. The capitalization of white in this study does not negate nor ignore white nationalists' usage of a capital to elevate white supremacist ideology.

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“We are seeing what we have known all of our lives. It may be a surprise to our White brothers and sisters. “It is systemic. It is deep and it runs in the Church.” – Clergy Participant

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The events of the year 2020; the global pandemic, the protests after the murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the presidential election, which clearly revealed the great divide for many, the United States and the world were forced to consider the lives of Black people. Protests erupted all over the United States calling for justice for Black people killed by police officers in the streets, equity, and the end of systemic racism. Systemic racism is embedded in the foundation of American culture, its institutions, including the Church.

Considering what happened in our country around racism, this project became more relevant for Black clergy and the congregations. For some, it was an opportunity to finally talk about what they have been thinking and feeling. Tears were shed. There was laughter, joy and anger as we shared our common experiences in the ministry. It was an honor to listen to their stories and read their surveys, giving voice to their joy and pain.

It was discovered early in the research that the clergy had different experiences serving in predominately White congregations. All the experiences were not negative, as I had assumed. Some of the clergy are thriving in their ministry settings; having affirming conversations on race, collaborating with their congregations to create a multicultural ministry which welcomes all.

Initially, the project focused on Black clergy serving in the United Church of Christ (UCC). However, interest in the study came from Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations among the Unitarian Universalist (UU), Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), and the Presbyterian Church (USA). I learned through the interviews that their experiences are different depending on the denomination in which they are ordained. For example, according to

those interviewed, the UU denomination's demographic is made up of mostly educated White membership, clergy and leaders. The MCC, a mostly educated and gay White male demographic made for different experiences, as expressed by the clergy.

One concern the clergy had in common, their desire for and lack of support from their denomination and collegial support from other Black clergy persons. The few lay leaders who participated in the study expressed the same need for their minister. The core desire of this project is to support the Black clergy in these ministry settings – to find the way for them to thrive.

### Problem/Question

This project was birthed out of conversations with other Black clergy, participation and observation in clergy of color social media groups, and my experience as a UCC pastor serving in predominantly White congregations. Increasingly, these congregations are calling Black clergy to serve as their pastor, as the clergy are applying for churches that are predominately White. Black clergy have expressed how these congregations expected that calling a Black clergy person would bring diversity and growth.

In my own experience, it was shared by a member of the search committee that the congregation was advised by the conference staff to “do something different.” Calling Black clergy to congregations that have experienced a change in demographics in the community surrounding an aging congregation has become a common occurrence. A once thriving White congregation finds itself in the center of a Black community, as the racial demographic of the neighborhood has changed. The congregations are hopeful that the Black clergy would be able to attract and engage the Black community, thereby increasing membership and the church could find new life and relevancy in the community.

The Black clergy were communicating that their congregations believed they had evolved enough in racial reconciliation where they could call a Black clergy person. The congregation and clergy soon discovered they were not prepared and preferred to not even discuss race or racism. The congregations were resistant to make the changes in the church’s culture, which is necessary to grow, retain their Black clergy and sustain the diversity the congregation desires. The Black clergy I have encountered were struggling with how to navigate the painful experiences which arise in this ministry setting. The congregations were finding themselves in

the search and call process sooner than they expected, with the Black clergy choosing to leave their pastorate.

For this study, I sought to discover the experiences of a larger sample of Black Clergy serving in predominately White congregations and how positive psychology could be used as a resource in assisting the Black clergy in this setting when the congregation desires more diversity and to become more multicultural in terms of race. Finally, I question whether positive psychology research in positive organizational scholarship can be used as a resource for positive leadership in achieving a mission-driven strategy<sup>3</sup> for creating and sustaining a diverse multicultural congregation?

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<sup>3</sup> A mission-driven strategy is taken from the work of Myers and Wooten, *The Transformational Power of a Mission-Driven Strategy*. It is a strategic mission that systematically incorporates diversity into its vision and purpose.

### Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the research study was to gain knowledge of the experiences of a broader number of Black clergy who have served or are serving in predominantly White congregations. This research was undertaken to discover a way to assist Black clergy and the congregations to understand what is required of them, the effects and the ramifications when Black clergy serve in predominately White congregations.

There was a desire to discover what methods are used by Black clergy who are having successful experiences, in hopes their leadership experiences would be helpful to other Black clergy persons. The argument will be made from the research that more intentionality and thought must be done by congregations, and denominational leadership when calling a Black clergy person to a predominantly White congregation, as many challenges surface leading to a painful experience for the clergy and the congregation members. As a result of the challenges experienced by the Black clergy, an argument is made that a mission-driven strategy is a good model for calling a Black clergy person when a predominately White congregation desires to create and sustain a diverse multicultural congregation.

The mission of creating and sustaining a diverse multicultural congregation informs how worship and liturgies are crafted, which Christian symbols are on display in the building, and the need to increase diversity in ministerial leadership, lay leadership, and staff. There must be a diverse representation in church leadership for the congregation to sustain a multicultural church. Also, the mission is not to increase diversity by numbers only, but rather creating an environment where the Black clergy's leadership is welcomed, everyone's gifts and talents are welcomed, and diversity is not merely tolerated, but celebrated.

The final purpose was to discover if positive psychology can be used in this strategy by creating a resource, which can assist the Black clergy who are already serving in a predominately White congregation. Also, to assist the congregation in preparing to call a Black clergy person and/or who has already called a Black clergy person.

### Central Terms

For the purpose of the study, culture is defined as the “patterns of daily life learned consciously and unconsciously by a group of people. These patterns can be seen in language, governing practices, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, dating rituals, and clothing, to name a few examples.”<sup>4</sup> Dominant Culture is the cultural group with most of the political power. For example, in the United States this would mean White, protestant males.<sup>5</sup> For this project, diversity means people from different races, cultures, orientations, gender identities, abilities, socio-economic classes, theology, socio-political ideology, and mental health status. Multicultural defined for this project means cultural diversity or a multicultural population as seen in the United States pluralistic society. In terms of a multicultural congregation, this would mean one that is inclusive and open toward diverse cultures. Inclusion or inclusive is a congregation having an ethic of inclusion of diverse persons. Diversity is welcomed at all levels in the congregation, from membership to leadership. Diverse persons are recognized and respected and participate and serve in the individual’s authentic self and culture. Assimilation into the dominant culture is not required.

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<sup>4</sup> United Church of Christ, “Sacred Conversations on Race: Immerse Yourself - Resource Guide” (Cleveland, Ohio, 2008), 42.

<sup>5</sup> United Church of Christ, 42.

In this project, positive psychology is an evidence-based science that focuses on positive emotions, identifying and building strengths and virtues to sustain a “good life,” which is the definition of happiness. Positive psychology focuses on what is right with humanity and communities and not fixing what is wrong. According to Martin Seligman, it has three “pillars:” the study of positive emotion, positive traits, which are the strengths and virtues, and the study of positive institutions, which support positive emotions.<sup>6</sup> The research and literature in this project will be used to reveal that positive psychology, using positive organizational scholarship for diversity management and positive leadership is a strategy proven successful in creating and sustaining diverse workplaces, and institutions.

For this project, I drew upon the research studies in positive organizational scholarship, and positive leadership to determine how positive psychology can be used in predominately White congregations who have called or desire to call a Black clergy person. Studies in positive organizational scholarship are introduced that have shown that challenges and obstacles, including those that surface in multicultural organizations, become opportunities for growth when examined through a positive lens. This study will also reveal how the practices of positive leadership, can help individuals and organizations flourish.

### Significance

Personally, and professionally this project is significant to me as a Black clergy woman who has served and will continue to serve in predominantly White congregations. Feeling called by God to these ministry settings and the justice work of racial reconciliation, quitting is not an option. My ministry experiences brought forth the realization that tangible tools are needed to

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<sup>6</sup> Martin E. P. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (New York: Free Press, 2002).

navigate the issues of race, diversity, and inclusion for the Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations.

The UCC's program, "Sacred Conversation on Race,"<sup>7</sup> has assisted UCC congregations in creating safe spaces and direction for conversations about race and racism. This project will introduce an original idea about race theory found in the work of the theologian Thandeka, in her work, *Learning to Be White*, which will aid in the research in understanding culture in congregations. This project sought to use the research gathered from interviewing Black clergy and their congregations to create a resource, which would be a tangible tool to assist them in thriving in their ministry, when a predominately White congregation call them to a mission of creating and sustaining a multicultural congregation.

There has been a paradigm shift in society which has impacted the local church. This shift is cultural due to increased diversity from globalization. For many churches, survival will mean adapting to the cultural changes that have happened in society and in their local communities. In the UCC, research has shown a correlation between increased racial and ethical diversity and congregational growth.<sup>8</sup> I argue that the work does not end at increased diversity in numbers. Congregations and their leaders must be intentional about and willing to enter uncomfortable conversations on race, racism, White privilege, inclusion, sexism, and homophobia and change behaviors which come with increased diversity. This work is too important to the Church to leave to chance.

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<sup>7</sup> United Church of Christ, "Sacred Conversations on Race: Immerse Yourself - Resource Guide."

<sup>8</sup> "FACTS on Growing Congregations: Findings from the United Church of Christ Faith Communities Today (FACT) Survey of Congregations.," 2015, [https://www.ucc.org/research\\_statistics-and-reports](https://www.ucc.org/research_statistics-and-reports).



Theologically, this project is significant as it is a response to the speech Peter gave after the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in the book of Acts. The religious leaders who witnessed the event believed the disciples were drunk and others were confused at the sight and sound of people of different nations understanding one another's language. Speaking from the prophet Joel in the Hebrew Bible, Peter, filled with the Spirit and power of God said, "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."<sup>9</sup>

The Church is empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the difficult. The Church was birthed in difference. It has thrived through indifference, and the sacrifice of people who were dedicated to the mission that Jesus set before them. In over 2000 years, the Church is still called to be the prophetic voice of social change in society in leading by example. Jesus said, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one...that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."<sup>10</sup>

God calls the Church to abundance and the good life. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."<sup>11</sup> The Church can and should be a place to face the challenges found in

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<sup>9</sup> "Oremus Bible Browser: Acts 2:1-13," accessed December 25, 2020, <https://bible.oremus.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> "Oremus Bible Browser: John 17:20-23," accessed July 8, 2019, <http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=John+17:20%9623>.

<sup>11</sup> "Oremus Bible Browser: John 10:9-11," accessed February 2, 2021, <https://bible.oremus.org/>.

today's pluralist society. Through facing the challenges, obstacles and situations that cause discomfort, congregations can find new life and flourish.

I have experienced racism, sexism, homophobia, homelessness and food insecurity. These experiences have impacted my life outcomes. During the positive psychology program I attended, I was one of only two Black students. I recognized that the research did not include the experiences of marginalized people, as the program focused on those who were not experiencing suffering nor systemic racism in their lives. As the instructor would discuss the research findings, they did not address the suffering and the continuous marginalization of Black people and how the trauma affects happiness, life goals and satisfaction, and self-actualization. Should the life experiences of the marginalized be ignored in positive psychology? Subsequently, while collecting the resources for this project, the criticisms of positive psychology's lack of voices and research of the marginalized were many in the field of Psychology.

During the program, I recognized that positive psychology would be an excellent tool for Black clergy who serve in predominately White congregations when the congregation wants to create and sustain a diverse multicultural congregation. The strengths of positive psychology, as developed by Martin Seligman through his research program, the Values in Action (VIA) Project is a classification system that includes 24 strengths categorized under six virtues. Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman drew on the literature review of Katherine Dahlsgaard, in *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, who read religious and philosophical texts of the world's most respected traditions. These sacred texts, including the Bible all identified the virtues of wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice temperance,

and transcendence.<sup>12</sup> The virtues provide an umbrella for the 24 strengths developed by Seligman in the VIA Project.

These strengths, creativity, curiosity, judgement, love of learning, perspective, bravery, perseverance, honesty, zest, love, kindness, social intelligence, teamwork, fairness, leadership, forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality and transcendence, have been proven through PP research, when an individual is engaged in what they love, using their strengths, they will produce positive emotions, and are better able to manage life's difficulties and adversity. The production of positive emotions is significant to positive organizing and positive leadership. Both the lack of diverse voices and the study of institutions has been recognized as a gap in the field of positive psychology. Using PP in congregational ministry would add to qualitative study of positive psychology.

### Assumptions

Several assumptions were brought to this project, Black clergy are struggling in predominately White congregations around issues of race and racism. Predominately White congregations hire Black clergy to attract African Americans, people of color, and increase membership and diversity. I theorized that congregations and the Black clergy must be intentional in carrying out this work to create the diversity they desire in the congregation. Diversity and creating a multicultural congregational must be at the very core of the mission, the purpose, the church's core values, and everything they do from hiring, volunteers, worship, meetings, and outreach. The research addressed these assumptions and confirmed a portion of

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Washington, DC : New York: American Psychological Association ; Oxford University Press, 2004), 223.

the theory. There is a need for a resource to assist Black clergy when they are called to serve in predominately White congregations or when the congregation desires to call a Black clergy person to increase diversity.

### Literature Deficiencies

Unfortunately, there is very limited literature or studies on the experiences of Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations in the United States, which makes this study significant to the field of congregational ministry. The literature that was available included, a few blog posts, a podcast from the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, and an article from the Association of Religion Database. Edwards and Kim of The Religious Leadership and Diversity Project of Ohio State University's Sociology Department, conducted a national study of multiracial church head clergy. Their study focused on how these clergy sustain and guide their congregations. Nineteen percent of the 121 head clergy that were interviewed were Black clergy. In the interviews with pastors, they did address their experiences.<sup>13</sup> I was able to acquire statistics from the UCC's Center for Analytical Research and Data (CARD) on the number of Black clergy in the UCC and the number serving in predominately White congregations. Malcom Himschoot, a White staff member in the national office of the UCC's Search and Call department, a student at Methodist Theological Seminary of Ohio completed his doctorate project on, *Lift Up: The Leadership of Pastors of Color in the United Church of Christ*. Dr. Himschoot interviewed 15 pastors of color, 10 African American, three Latinx and two Bi-

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<sup>13</sup> "Religious Leadership and Diversity Project," accessed July 8, 2019, <http://www.rldp.net/>.

racial, one African American and the other Asian. He describes the leadership experiences serving as pastors in “white-founded” congregations.<sup>14</sup>

## Literature Review

### Black Clergy Experiences

On the website, “Ecclesio.com,” Black clergy serving in predominantly White congregations have found a place to give voice to their experiences. Founded by Rev. Dr. Cynthia Holder Rich, the website is host to conversations with scholars, pastors, activists and church leaders around the world. Ecclesio tackles difficult topics “facing the church, or that the church should be facing.”<sup>15</sup>

Rev. Derrick Weston, A Black clergy person shares the story of his first call experience in a White congregation that was thriving in the 50s and 60s. The demographics of the community changed by race and income. He was called as a “last ditch effort” to connect the church to the community and “save the church.” He wrote about his frustration at their “unwillingness” to struggle with their history of racism, which was known in the community. He became the “scapegoat” for the church’s issues, as he looked like the people the membership had blamed for the churches downward spiral.<sup>16</sup>

Bianca Davis-Lovelace is a UCC ordained minister. She writes about her experience doing the “dance of inclusion in dominant culture churches.” From her observation and experience she concludes that White churches claim they are ready for diversity, but they are not

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<sup>14</sup> Malcolm Himschoot, “Lift Up: The Leadership of Pastors of Color in the United Church of Christ” (Dissertation, Delaware, Ohio, Methodist Theological Seminary of Ohio, 2020), 61.

<sup>15</sup> “Ecclesio.Com,” *Ecclesio.Com* (blog), accessed July 9, 2019, <http://www.ecclesio.com/about/>.

<sup>16</sup> Cynthia Holder Rich, “Stranger in a Strange Land: The Story of a Black clergy Pastor in a White Church by Derrick Weston,” *Ecclesio.Com* (blog), October 31, 2017, accessed July 9, 2019, <http://www.ecclesio.com/2017/10/stranger-strange-land-story-Black-clergy-pastor-White-church-derrick-weston/>.

prepared to take leadership from an African American. She states, “Many only wanted diversity for appearance. Whiteness is still centered in worship, governance, and programming.” She writes of her struggle of constant discomfort and the expectation that Black clergy pastors are to “assimilate to the dominant culture.”<sup>17</sup>

Kevin L. Smith, Assistant Professor of Christian Preaching at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Executive Director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware. Rev. Dr. Smith discusses his experience pursuing racial unity by being a Black clergy pastor in a predominantly White church. He states, “We need to think at systemic levels, but the most important level is local where relationships happen.” He spoke with excitement of the fellowship and friendship experiences with his White counterparts. He talks about his openness to the “mysterious nature of the fact that whatever is going to be done, has to be done by God.” His ethics of serving in White spaces is informed by pneumatology – the Spirit comes when the people are on one accord. His answer to why he serves in predominantly White spaces is the belief that different models are needed in Southern Baptist life. And a model that is part of multiethnic ministry and unity of God’s people that answers the question, “What does it look like when people of other ethnicities submit to Black clergy leadership?”<sup>18</sup>

In the Himschoot study, their research revealed that the pastors of color serving in “white-founded” congregations experienced resistance to their leadership as a common narrative. Quoting a participant, “This is what they said they want to do, but this is not what they want to

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<sup>17</sup> Cynthia Holder Rich, “The Dance of Inclusion: African American Leadership in Dominant Culture Churches by Bianca Davis-Lovelace,” *Ecclesio.Com* (blog), November 1, 2017, accessed July 9, 2019, <http://www.ecclesio.com/2017/11/dance-inclusion-african-american-leadership-dominant-culture-churchesby-bianca-davis-lovelace/>.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin L. Smith, “White Church, Black clergy Pastor: Pursuing Racial Unity,” ERLC, August 8, 2017, accessed July 9, 2019, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/erlc-podcast-episodes/White-church-Black-clergy-pastor-pursuing-racial-unity>.

do.” Like the Black clergy in this study explained, the congregation thinks, “they wanted the change that they thought that they believed that they wanted.”<sup>19</sup>

## Race and Racism

Thandeka, a UU minister and theologian in, *Learning to be White* argues, “No one is born white in America.” The author created the Race Game where White participants were required to use the word “white” when naming someone in a conversation, for example, “my White husband Bill,” or “my White friend Carol.” Thandeka’s theory that White people are “assigned a race by America’s pervasive socialization process.”<sup>20</sup> This process, she discovered after interviewing those who played the game, was learned as a child through an event(s) which brought shame, and fear of being ostracized from one’s community. The children learned there are those who are “white and those who are colored.” The shame and fear from the event violated the core values of the child into adulthood, which caused an internal conflict.<sup>21</sup> Thandeka learned from those she interviewed that they, “did not think of themselves as white.”<sup>22</sup> Thandeka’s research forms the basis of original thought in race theory which will bring the socialization of whiteness to the forefront of race, racism and racial justice work in congregations that call a Black clergy person.

Award winning author Isabel Wilkerson, in her book, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, posits an argument that is important to understanding the foundation of resistance to the leadership of Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations. She explains about race and the American caste system, “What people look like, or, rather, the race they have been assigned or are perceived to belong to, is the visible cue to their caste. It is the historic flash card

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<sup>19</sup> Himschoot, “Lift Up: The Leadership of Pastors of Color in the United Church of Christ,” 86.

<sup>20</sup> Thandeka, *Learning to Be White: Money, Race and God in America* (New York London: Continuum, 1999), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Thandeka, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Thandeka, 16.

to the public of how they are to be treated, where they are expected to live, what kinds of positions they are expected to hold, whether they belong in this section of town or that seat in a boardroom, whether they should be expected to speak with authority on this or that subject...”<sup>23</sup>

### Cultural Shift in Society

Author Juana Bordas, in *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age*, lists a litany of dynamics that have shifted the face of America to one of greater diversity. Together they describe the globalization of American society. From immigration, technology, diverse workplaces, the civil rights movement, the education of leaders from diverse communities, to name a few, have contributed to this shift to diverse multicultural communities.<sup>24</sup>

Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martinez, in *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*, argue that many of the cities and neighborhoods in the US display the cultural diversity or pluralism of the nation. However, where you don’t see it is in the United States’ churches. They are correct when they state that Americans are shaped by our history of racism and prejudice. We hold this history in the depth of our being and it informs our actions and choices. Yes, racism is built into our institutions, including the Church.<sup>25</sup>

### Globalization and the Response of the Church

Phyllis Tickle, in *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* describes the “great emergence” of the church as the current 500-year shift in the church. In this

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<sup>23</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, Kindle (New York: Random House, 2020), 18.

<sup>24</sup> Juana Bordas, *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age*, 2nd ed, A BK Business Book (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2011), 12.



shift, Tickle argues that it will “notably” be global. I agree that diverse multicultural churches will be the hallmark during this new reformation of Church life. None of the former ways or barriers to community, such as race, nationality, socio-economic class will matter. We will enter a relational model of the Christian life that is not hierarchical.<sup>26</sup>

Branson and Martinez refer to the writing of Milton Gordon on society, race and assimilation, which is over 50 years old, states, “Which model (or models) best reflects both the diversity (all peoples, languages, ethnicities) and the unity that is appropriate for the United States?” I agree, it is a “gospel reconciliation model,”<sup>27</sup> but how can we live this experience in our churches if they are segregated and when they do call a Black clergy, congregations do not want to enter the discomfort of talking about race and racism? How will the Church eradicate itself of its racial bias and act on eliminating racism, if the predominately White congregation is not willing to have the conversation in the presence of their Black pastor. One can question, does the Church want to put an end to its racism?

Eric H.F. Law, in *“Sacred Acts, Holy Change: Faithful Diversity and Practical Transformation,”* argues that the Church’s response to the challenges of diversity in the global society is a desire for the local church to simply be a place of refuge from the chaos of society. He believes that by the time people get to church they are exhausted by the changes they have had to face in society day by day. They need the church to be a place of calm and shelter. I agree with the author that Church has become a place where the people can, “hold on to some semblance of certainty in a world of uncertainty, relativism, and pluralism.” They can hold on to

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<sup>26</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2008), 153.

<sup>27</sup> Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 17.

their sense of control and power.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, in wanting to maintain the current culture and feel safe, the church is not responding to today's challenges of diversity or they are responding in a way that can be harmful to clergy and to the congregations. The paradigm shift that has happened in society requires new methods of ministry. The old way of, "maintain and adjust what they already had no longer works." This method does not address the "deep and profound challenges," such as racism.<sup>29</sup>

To create and sustain a multicultural congregation, the structures in the church must change. Juana Bordas argues that the dominant culture often requires diverse people in the organization to adapt or assimilate. Which is often the case when Black clergy enter predominantly White congregations. They are welcome, but their traditions and culture, which are different cannot be accepted nor celebrated. Agreeing with the author, this will prevent a congregation from truly becoming and staying multicultural.<sup>30</sup>

Kathleen Garces-Foley, in *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission*, offers the idea for the church to become a place where social divisions can be overcome, the goal must move beyond numerical diversity.<sup>31</sup> Agreeing with the author, an inclusive community where all are welcomed and invited to serve in the life of the church using their strengths for the good of the collective community. Garces-Foley suggests worship is the most important time in the local church to see the commitment to diversity of the multicultural

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<sup>28</sup> Eric H. F. Law, *Sacred Acts, Holy Change: Faithful Diversity and Practical Transformation* (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2002), 16.

<sup>29</sup> Law, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Bordas, *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit*, 203.

<sup>31</sup> Kathleen Garces-Foley, *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series (Oxford, UK ; New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2007), 82.

community. He recommends hiring and using lay leaders that represent the diversity of the global church.<sup>32</sup>

Tracey M. Lewis-Giggetts, author of *“The Integrated Church: Authentic Multicultural Ministry,”* suggests congregations be willing to delve into these topics challenging themselves to be uncomfortable for the church to grow.<sup>33</sup> I agree with the author that the color-blind approach to creating a multicultural focus asks those they wish to be in community with to experience, “colonized worship and community.”<sup>34</sup> It is a “mistake...trying to cancel out, ignore, or deny the background of their congregants...as if this will increase tolerance. “We want to celebrate diversity and not tolerate it.”<sup>35</sup>

Congregations which have a stated mission of creating and sustaining diversity and multicultural community must be intentional in building community. There is a great deal of risk involved, which can result in harm to those in marginalized communities. I appreciate Mary McClintock Fulkerson’s self-observation in her contact with Good Samaritan United Methodist Church from her book, *“Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church.”* She recognized her discomfort when encountering darker and differently abled individuals. She first recognized in herself how she brought her own biases, fears, and “worldliness” into that place of worship.<sup>36</sup> This “disgust” and discomfort with otherness that Fulkerson discovered in herself at

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<sup>32</sup> Garces-Foley, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Tracey M. Lewis-Giggetts, *The Integrated Church: Authentic Multicultural Ministry* (Kansas City, Mo: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2011), 15.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis-Giggetts, *The Integrated Church*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Lewis-Giggetts, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Good Samaritan, will be an impetus in the failure in creating a diverse multicultural congregation if the issues that arise from the infusion of diversity are not addressed with intentionality.

Valerie Myers and Lynn Perry Wooten, in the “*Transformational Power of a Mission-Driven Strategy: Organizational Dynamics*,” completed a case study on positive organizing and a mission-driven diversity program in a healthcare system. They argued that combining positive organization and diversity was an opportunity to provide exceptional care to patients through a strength-based approach where every individual’s strengths are valued regardless of their difference or sameness. What they discovered in the healthcare system was that the mission of diversity must be “systematically incorporated” into its strategic vision; culturally, in core values and processes. It reminds the organization of its purpose, its goals and details the direction of how they will operate.<sup>37</sup> In their study of the healthcare system, they learned that diversity training was an integral part in sustaining diversity.

As Lewis-Giggetts suggests above, the experiences of the Black clergy in this study revealed the need to discuss race, racism, cultural difference during the search and call process. If creating and sustaining diversity and growth in the predominately White church is the goal, a mission-driven strategy, which informs how they practice ministry with their Black clergy person would be beneficial.

### Positive Psychology

Although positive psychology is a very young field, it is believed to have its beginning with psychologist and humanist, Abraham Maslow. Maslow is believed to be the first to use the

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<sup>37</sup> Valerie Myers and Lynn Perry Wooten, “The Transformational Power of a Mission-Driven Strategy;,” *Organizational Dynamics* 38, no. 4 (October 2009): 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2009.07.004>.

term, “positive psychology.” In his book, “*A Theory of Human Motivation*,” he accused the science of psychology of being, “...more successful on the negative than on the positive side...”<sup>38</sup> In his theory of humanity's Hierarchy of Needs, Maslow theorized, if any of the basic physiological, safety or self-esteem needs were not met, an individual could not focus on the higher need of self-actualization (fig 1),<sup>39</sup> the motivation for the human being to determine and seek their fullest potential. He called those who had all the basic needs met, “satisfied people.”<sup>40</sup> Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory of self-actualization is the model in which Martin Seligman, known as the “father of positive psychology” based this new focus of psychology.

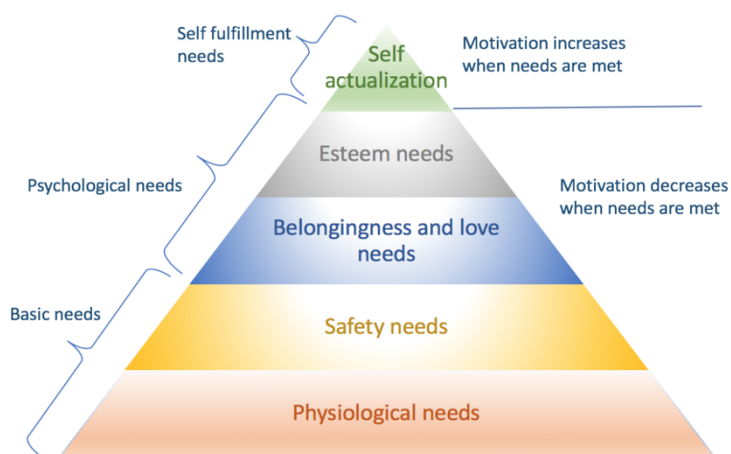


Figure 1

Martin E.P. Seligman’s article, “Positive Psychology: An Introduction,” he theorizes that prior to World War II, (WWII) curing mental illness, making the lives of people more productive and fulfilling, and identifying and nurturing high talent was the mission of psychology. “Psychology’s empirical focus shifted to assessing and curing individual suffering.” positive psychology was not developed to replace standard psychology, but to infuse the field with a

<sup>38</sup> “Humanistic And Positive Psychology,” Psychology Today, accessed December 23, 2020, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/what-doesnt-kill-us/201412/humanistic-and-positive-psychology>.

<sup>39</sup> Abraham H Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation* (Kindle: Start Publishing LLC, 2012), Cover.

<sup>40</sup> Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*.

strength-based approach. For Seligman, similar to Maslow, the field of psychology had focused too much on negative pathology and curing what is wrong and not lifting up what is right.<sup>41</sup>

In “*Transforming Congregational Culture*,” Anthony B. Robinson describes the work of a “ministry culture” for transformation in the church as one with three elements. These three corroborate the use of positive psychology’s strength’s model. These are identifying and affirming gifts and callings, and then equipping and training the people for ministry work.<sup>42</sup> Martin Seligman described it this way, “If you can find a way to use your signature strengths at work often, and you also see your work as contributing to the greater good, you have a calling.”<sup>43</sup> Imagine, churches becoming places for people to discover and live out their purpose and calling! Add to this environment a mission of creating and sustaining a diverse multicultural local church, you will find reconciliation and freedom to be who and what God calls humanity and Church.

Juana Bordas argues that multicultural leadership should be an inclusive approach that is embedded in a community’s practices and values from the diversity that is present in our global society. This type of leadership will, “...encourage diverse people to actively engage, contribute, and tap their potential.”<sup>44</sup> Again, I recognize this as an avenue for how positive psychology’s use of strengths can be beneficial to a mission-driven strategy for creating and sustaining a diverse multicultural congregation. She continues to argue that this type of leadership model has the

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<sup>41</sup> Martin E. P. Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “Positive Psychology: An Introduction.,” *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5>.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony B. Robinson, *Transforming Congregational Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2003), 76.

<sup>43</sup> Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*.

<sup>44</sup> Bordas, *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit*, 8.

“ability to bring out the best in our diverse workforce and to fashion a sense of community with people from any part of the globe.”<sup>45</sup>

Many predominately White congregations avoid the topics of race, racism, and/or diversity for many reasons. I believe that these conversations and creating and sustaining diversity are possible by employing everyone’s signature strengths in the congregation. Mark R. McMinn, in *The Science of Virtues*, argues that most Christians believe that God will alleviate our suffering and pain. We can’t hide from those things that cause us pain and discomfort. Eventually, they will catch up with us. Using our signature strengths for a virtue-based way of life, we will see God working in our lives, “pointing us to hope, faith, and love.”<sup>46</sup> This is putting your strengths into action and challenges become opportunities to grow and change.

Christopher Peterson and Martin E.P. Seligman’s classification of signature strengths and virtues from their book, “*Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*,” is a wealth of information. This classification system was created to provide a way to discuss and measure strengths. The authors believe that this classification system is an excellent tool to create interventions that increase opportunities for a good life.<sup>47</sup> They argue that the use of signature strengths is fulfilling. And, the criteria, such as a sense of ownership and authenticity (“this is the real me”) and most importantly, continuous learning of new ways to enact the strength, are motivational and emotional. Using signature strengths in the mission work of creating and sustaining diversity in the local church can elicit the following emotions according

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<sup>45</sup> Bordas, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Mark R. McMinn, *The Science of Virtue: Why Positive Psychology Matters to the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2017), 165.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Washington, DC: New York: American Psychological Association; Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.

to Peterson and Seligman's theory: excitement, yearning, inevitability, discovery, and invigoration.<sup>48</sup>

### A Gap in the Field of Positive Psychology

Both the lack of diverse voices and the study of institutions has been recognized by the leading voices in the fields of psychology and positive psychology as a gap in the field. John Chambers Christopher, Frank C. Richardson, and Brent D. Slife in "Thinking through positive psychology," argue, "...how we can speak to questions of human character and the good life in a pluralistic society, and how we can clarify the nature of human agency and responsibility despite quite different views of them across cultures. Thus far, positive psychology gives only limited attention to these issues."<sup>49</sup> One of the purposes of this research project is to add research to the field of positive psychology from the voice of a Black woman.

Kate Heffron's editorial, "*Understanding Optimal Human Functioning – The 'call for qual' in Exploring Human Flourishing and Well-Being*," she explains the need for qualitative research that values, "the messiness and complexity of human life...these approaches are ideal for exploring under-researched areas of investigation and allow for the development of novel, bottom-up theories, often acknowledging historical, cultural, societal and/or political influences on the data produced."<sup>50</sup> This research study of Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations focusing on their experiences and how positive psychology will contribute to qualitative research gap described by Heffron.

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<sup>48</sup> Peterson and Seligman, 18.

<sup>49</sup> John Chambers Christopher, Frank C. Richardson, and Brent D. Slife, "Thinking through Positive Psychology," *Theory & Psychology* 18, no. 5 (October 1, 2008): 555, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354308093395>.

<sup>50</sup> Kate Heffron et al., "Understanding Optimal Human Functioning – The 'Call for Qual' in Exploring Human Flourishing and Well-Being," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 3 (May 4, 2017): 211–19.



Okasana Yakushko in her article, *Don't Worry, Be Happy: Erasing Racism, Sexism, and Poverty in Positive Psychology*, argues that positive psychology has ignored the “systemic and institutionalized forms of oppression or rationalizing oppression as a positive force, but also judgment of feelings, experiences, and actions that are central to addressing prejudice and social violence. Suffering is presented as a failure of self-control.”<sup>51</sup> Yakushko’s argument is important to this study, as one must understand the historical nature of race and systemic racism in America before applying positive emotions to negative experiences of these Black clergy.

Martin Seligman contemplated wealth and privilege while observing poverty and being served by Black waiters while visiting the Bahamas. He wrote, “I wonder if positive psychology will only appeal to people near to the top of Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs?”<sup>52</sup> I believe positive psychology’s focus on strengths and virtues will not only appeal to all persons, because strengths are universal, the identification, use and building up of individual strengths in a congregation can transform that church into one where its members find calling, purpose and are able to manage and engage the uncomfortable conversations around race and racism, as well as poverty, homophobia, sexism and the other isms.

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<sup>51</sup> Oksana Yakushko, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy: Erasing Racism, Sexism, and Poverty in Positive Psychology,” *Psychotherapy and Politics International* 16, no. 1 (February 1, 2018): 9.

<sup>52</sup> Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*.

## **Chapter Two: Research Methodology**

The project proposal, which was approved by the Doctor of Ministry Committee and the Institutional Review Board of Franklin Marshall College was a mixed-methods approach. The first step of the project was to survey 10-12 Black UCC clergy persons using close-ended questions. At the end of the research portion of the study, I was able to engage two UCC Black clergy persons. My research mostly focused on Black clergy in the Unitarian Universalist (UU), Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), Presbyterian USA (PCUSA). As a UCC ordained minister and wanting to focus my project on the UCC, I was disappointed, as I knew there are significantly larger numbers of Black clergy serving in predominately White churches in the UCC.

According to Dr. Erica Dollhopf, Director of The Center for Analytics, Research and Data of the United Church of Christ, in September 2019 there were 57 ordained Black UCC clergy serving in predominately White congregations.<sup>53</sup> However, after listening to the research participants of the other denominations, one can understand the need for this research, and it is far more reaching than just the UCC.

A website was created; [revcelestinefields.com](http://revcelestinefields.com), which was a clearing house for research participants to easily interact with the study. The website was connected to Google Suite, which was used to create and gather data from the clergy. The purpose of the survey was to collect basic data and information about their congregational setting, race, and racism. The clergy were interviewed using open-ended questions to discover their experiences. Surveying the clergy assisted in acquiring basic demographic information, as well as collecting data on the pastors and

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<sup>53</sup> Erica Dollhopf, "African American Clergy Serving in Predominately White United Church of Christ Congregations September 2019," September 5, 2019. E-mail.

their thoughts and experiences on their congregation around race and racism. The interviews with the clergy helped discover what the pastor's experiences were serving in their predominately White congregation.

The survey data was collected using Google Suite and exported to an Excel spreadsheet. The data was summarized into groups and analyzed looking for common trends and patterns in the clergy experiences. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using an iPad application. The data from surveys and interviews were evaluated for their usefulness in informing the creation of a positive psychology resource for Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations, which have called or desire to call a Black clergy person and/or desire to make creating and sustaining a multicultural congregation their mission.

According to Seligman, when an individual is engaged in activities using their core strengths, they elicit positive emotions and are thus able to manage adversity.<sup>54</sup> Donna Webster Nelson's research in "Feeling Good and Open-Minded: The Impact of Positive Affect on Cross Cultural Empathic Responding," revealed that those who are experiencing positive emotions show a great capacity to have compassion and sympathy for those of different cultural identities.<sup>55</sup> Research conducted by Valerie Myers and Lynn Perry Wooten in their article, "The Transformational Power of a Mission-Driven Strategy," determined that using positive organizing, using strength-based, in a mission-driven organization, that seeks diversity, will have success with the challenges that come with increased diversity.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, all those who were interviewed were asked to complete Martin E.P. Seligman's, "VIA Institute of Character

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<sup>54</sup> Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*.

<sup>55</sup> Donna Webster Nelson, "Feeling Good and Open-Minded: The Impact of Positive Affect on Cross Cultural Empathic Responding," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 4, no. 1 (January 2009): 53–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760802357859>.

<sup>56</sup> Myers and Wooten, "The Transformational Power of a Mission-Driven Strategy," 297–98.

Strength's Survey," which is a primary tool used in positive psychology.<sup>57</sup> After completion, they evaluated their experience of using the survey and its usefulness in their congregation setting around issues of race.

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<sup>57</sup> "Personality Test, Personality Assessment: VIA Survey | VIA Institute," accessed August 13, 2019, <http://viacharacter.org/survey/account/register>.

### **Chapter Three: Data and Research Results**

Twelve surveys were collected from Black clergy persons. Only ten were qualified to be included in the study, as two did not have a significantly high enough number of White congregation members than people of color. As time was of the essence, some of the surveys were completed in a phone conversation. The ten clergy serve or have formerly served in predominately White congregations that were 85% White or higher. The participants represent four denominations: (1) UCC; (2) MCC; (3) PCUSA, and (4) UU. Of the ten, two served in the capacity of associate beside a White senior clergy person. Race and racism are divisive topics in America and can cause unwelcomed harm to the research participants in this study. Due to the low number of participants, the number from each denomination will not be identified to protect their identity, as well as not associating experiences to their specific denomination.

Worship attendance on Sunday averaged 79 participants. Four of the clergy have a Sunday attendance between 100-192 worshippers. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated they were called with an intention of increasing diversity and 50% indicated they were not called to increase diversity. One research participant indicated that they were called to increase membership, which is a “no” answer. Another participant indicated a “yes” answer through on the comment line, which made the total 50% “yes” and 50% “no (fig. 2).”

The clergy communicated the following reasons they were called to increase diversity:

(1) clergy person “heard” because the community is Black; (2) the congregation wanted the

Where you called with the specific intention to increase diversity?

10 responses

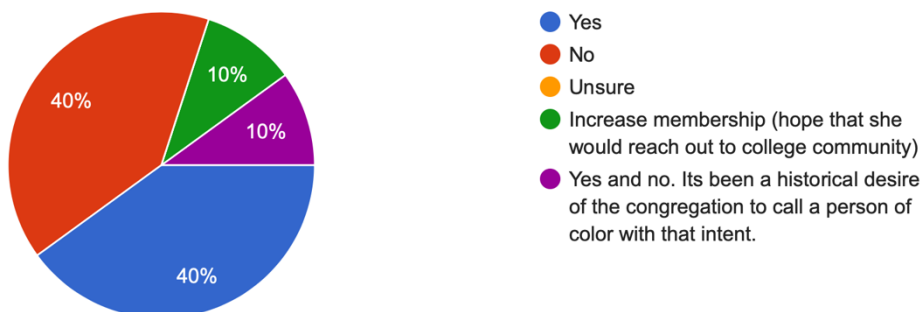


Figure 2

church membership to look like the neighborhood they served; (3) the associate was Black; (4) neighborhood surrounding the church was diverse; (5) church lacked people of color, and (6) the church needs to embrace the multiculturalism of the world.

Whether it was possible for these Black clergy to accomplish increasing diversity, as desired by the congregation, it would be dependent upon the community the church was located. Over 90% of the clergy indicated diversity was possible because: (1) the neighborhood demographic; (2) the community was predominately Black and Hispanic; (3) the presence of colleges and universities; (4) the neighborhood was experiencing gentrification; (5) a large presence of military families; and (6) a huge Asian, Native American and interracial community.

Sixty percent of the clergy identified the congregation as a multiracial, multicultural or as a diverse congregation. The diverse, multicultural nature of their congregation was not based on race, as the question asked (fig 2), but on; (1) political ideology and party; (2) theological beliefs; (3) age; (4) gender; (5) orientation, and (6) ethnicity.

Do you consider the congregation you served in to be multiracial, multicultural or diverse?

10 responses

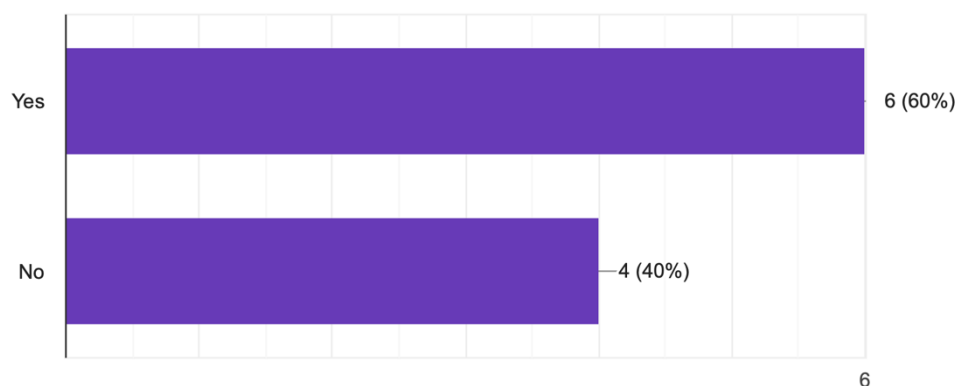


Figure 3

Seventy percent responded that diversity had increased when they were called to the church (fig 3). They attribute the growth in diversity to: (1) their presence as a Black minister; (2) intentionally reaching out to the community; (3) changing music; (4) the church opened up space in the church for community led events; (5) direct and intentional outreach to Black people in the community, and (6) the Black clergy person doing outreach to students of color attending neighboring colleges and universities.

In terms of tackling the conversations around race, racism and diversity, the question, “Did you and the congregation have conversations about race, racism and/or diversity?” was changed to consider the current events of the year 2020. The pandemic and the protests around the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor increased the awareness of race and racism in America. It appeared everyone was talking about racial justice and discussing it in new and different ways than in the past, including mainstream news outlets.

The question was reframed as, “Prior to the 2020 protests and Covid-19, did you and the congregation have a conversation about race, racism and diversity?” Eighty percent had conversations about race, racism and diversity prior to the pandemic and the protests of 2020.

The resources used included: (1) UCC Sacred Conversations on Race; (2) UCC White Privilege: Let's Talk curriculum; (3) Dr. Jennifer Harvey; (4) book studies on White supremacy, identity, race and racism; (5) Open Hearts; (6) someone from the local area provided training on microaggressions and understanding White privilege, and (7) the UCC Beloved Conversation curriculum. One hundred percent of the Black clergy were willing to have conversations about race and racism with their congregations. The reasons stated were: (1) consistency with the church's mission; (2) importance as the congregation is predominately White; (3) role of the Gospel calling; (4) utilized as a resource in the community when an issue of race evolves; (5) essential to finding our covenantal place in the fabric of who we are as a people and denomination, and (6) the Black clergy person told the congregation to not call them to increase diversity if they are not ready to have conversations around race. One of the Black clergy persons was willing to have conversations around race, but was clear they would not be the, "race ambassador" of the church, as they are the spiritual leader.

Seventy-nine percent of the clergy indicated in the survey that the congregation was ready to struggle with racial justice together. The clergy indicated that 70% of the congregations had made cultural changes in symbols, liturgies, and worship style to engage with a diverse population.

In considering specialized training for the clergy, 50% believe training is necessary, 30% said, "no," and 20% were unsure. The majority of the clergy expressed a lack of need for training. They know who they are before serving in predominately White churches and they have lived this experience of race and racism for their entire lives. The clergy believe the congregations need the training. What the clergy think would be helpful: (1) training explaining the cultural norms of White churches; (2) self-care for mental, physical and emotional health



while serving; (4) network of clergy to collaborate and support; (5) denominational training and support, especially when formal complaints are made that are racially charged; (6) congregations need training; (7) training in conflict management specific to a racialized setting; (8) training for the congregation on how to receive leadership from a Black clergy person, and (9) training for Black people, training focused for White congregants, and a brave safe space for them to come back together.

One MCC clergy narrated during a phone survey about specialized training, “Yes. Any of the denominations that have a welcoming and affirming designation. No church should bring a pastor of color as the senior if they have not been through that training. The Methodists have a program. A Methodist church in Connecticut went through a two-year program with a White congregation. They had specific things to do and had to get certified. No church could be open and affirming and not have this training. Forcing them to assess themselves. Are you ready?”

Nine of the clergy participated in the positive psychology portion of the survey. Eight of those indicated that the VIA Strength Survey would be beneficial to their lay leadership work in their church. Sixty-seven percent would like to learn how their core strengths can assist them in the leadership of their congregation in issues around race and racism. Their experiences of the VIA Strength’s Survey ranged from the enjoyment of learning their strengths to it not connecting to the specifics of what their experience or strengths are related to race and navigating racial difference in communities, and the questions got to the heart of race relations in congregations.

In the final question of the survey, forty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they would be willing to engage their lay leadership, board members, or search committee in the research project. Some of the reasons for not engaging their lay leadership were: (1) they are not ready; (2) the clergy is retiring soon; (3) they are in the midst of transitions; (4) they need

education first; (5) too difficult to get them involved, and (6) the clergy is no longer serving the congregation.

Of the ten survey participants, seven agreed to the interview portion of the study. To protect the identity of the participants, gender will be mostly neutralized, except where it is used to make a point. Specific locations mentioned during the interviews will be omitted as well to protect their identity. Key terms and phrases, which showed a common pattern in their experiences were sorted in a spreadsheet, which are listed below. To ensure their individual voices are heard, the narratives of those experiences will be quoted as well.

Q1. What is or has been your experience being a Black clergy person serving in a predominantly White congregation, revealed common themes and patterns in their experiences. They are as follows; (1) color-blindness; (2) disrespect; (3) no support; (4) pressure to be the voice of all Black people; (5) discerning call, leaving or never returning again to predominately White churches, and (6) the most common experience and most troublesome to the clergy, resistance to receiving their leadership.

First focusing on the experiences of resistance to their leadership, as the foundation of the majority of their negative experiences, of the seven interviewees, only one participant verbalized their experience was positive:

- I would say overall it has been a net positive experience. I don't know to what extent, on a day-to-day basis my being Black has influenced my ministry. I think sometimes there is some question of like my competencies. I think folks will offer these ideas, unsolicited ideas, and advice in a way that I am like, 'I didn't need that,' or 'I didn't ask for that,' or 'was that actually necessary?' So, there is an assumption of expertise that I think a lot of the members have that sometimes rubs me the wrong way. But to be honest, I think that is poor social skills to give unsolicited advice.

The clergy described these experiences of the questioning their leadership:

- I am the one responsible, period for worship...I started asking some questions and the person said I had insulted their intelligence and talked down to them.

Clergy described experiences of a congregant having an issue with their leadership, instead of coming directly to them to address it, they would talk to another congregant, and quit the church, without talking to the pastor.

- They may feel it had no place in the sermon. Instead of doing that [coming to me], they say nothing to you, send a note or Facebook note to someone else saying, 'I quit the church.' I said to the person who received the note, 'didn't you think you should have forwarded the note.' They said, 'I was sure someone else would send it to you.' I felt like, Oh, you are the hired help.

An interviewee having what one could define as a productive and beneficial experience for the congregation and for themselves, expressed this concern of the ways in which they have been hindered:

- The most striking example is that there are times my leadership is not just questioned, but down right ignored. I go back to the consideration that I know full well, because I have many White colleagues, and in fact I know all the colleagues, prior ministers, who are still living, of this church that they have never had their leadership questioned in that way or ignored." What is remarkable about this experience is his ability to call them out on their behavior: "You are ignoring my leadership right now and I actually believe that this is because I am a Black man, and you don't know how to receive my leadership and take it seriously." I asked, "How did they respond to that?" They said, "They are getting better. The first

time, they sort of shrunk into their White little shells with self-shaming and beating themselves up. I said, 'Look, I don't need you to do that. I need you to follow my leadership. This isn't about y'all. This is about us as a church moving in a direction. Either you or going to take my leadership or you're not.'

- ...you are aware that there are some folks who are not happy that you are there. And some who are, I am not sure this is right, but let's see what will happen. To a degree, you are going to have more separation from the standpoint you will find folks are less likely to always want to have the pastor over doing things."
- Associates serving along-side a White senior clergy person experienced indirect resistance to their leadership. The congregants would do so through the senior pastor. "There were people there that had an issue with me. There were a couple of White folks, of course, that had challenges with him asking me to be associate pastor. When I came on staff there was several who were White that went to him and said that they didn't appreciate the fact...questioned his right to do it as the senior pastor."
- The most egregious experience was in a rural setting where they were yelled at during a meeting. They said, "...12-14 people sitting around the table and did not express any displeasure in what they were witnessing. That it was okay for him to be yelling at the top of his lungs at his pastor...would this be happening if I were not Black?"
- I had a visioning retreat for the leadership team; setting a vision going forward, what was good, not so good and how we would grow as a congregation. I would cook all the food. They did not have to worry about cooking. Three of the

leadership team did not show up. Two did not say they would not attend. Didn't tell anyone. They just did not show up. Reached out to two people asked, 'Do you want to meet? I can give you the handouts and get your input on ideas.' One said, 'I don't have anything to add.' The other said, 'I don't like retreats. I didn't like them when I worked and I don't want them now, even over coffee.' She is not interested. That person was a leader who held key positions in the church; elder, personnel committee and one of the trustees. Her unwillingness to attend the retreat and not have a cup of coffee about the retreat was a small indicator of how resistant she was going to be.

- The chair of the personnel committee did all the performance reviews of staff without consulting me. People I saw every day and weekly depending on the position, she did not consult with them on how they were doing. She did the same for my evaluation. No conversation with them, the committee met without me, made their determination and what their salary would be. This person continued to have meetings, electronically...I asked if future meetings could be held in person and shared my rationale and she had two other meetings again without me.

The Black clergy experienced positive and negative reception to their leadership from community organizations:

- Some of the connections I have made with our interfaith partners in the Muslim community and Hindu community. I think in some ways it is easier for some folks to relate to me in those communities, than a more traditional, White minister in this setting. Overall, I feel like it has been very positive.

- ...he wanted me to meet the president of the group that ran the AIDS support services that he dealt with. I go in, the director was not ready to deal with the Black person. You could see the uneasiness. Then you become invisible.

The issue of their congregants saying, “I don’t see your color” was common. They described these experiences during the first question, as well as during the question of experiencing racism.

- I understand the person was being sincere, but I had to breathe, have a moment to explain to them why what he said was inappropriate, and it became a learning opportunity for everybody at the time.

Across all denominations, the leadership were blind to color

- They displayed no concern for the Black clergy person being the only Black person in a White church and a White community. I was not on their radar. ‘I wonder how that lone Black clergy person is doing in that White community.’ If I didn’t call people, I would not meet people. On the holidays, I was on my own. No one called me. I called a pastor a few towns over, ‘what are you doing on the 4<sup>th</sup>, I don’t want to be alone.’ I don’t understand how people are not attuned to this kind of stuff, the loneliness and isolation.

Their denominational leaders did not support the Black clergy nor recognize or affirm their experiences of racism:

- When I realized there were some problems, I called and called denominational leadership to get them to hear what my experiences were. I called for eight

months and never saw them. They were always, ‘going to get to it’ or ‘going to check the schedule.’

The clergy felt pressured to be and resisted being representative of all Black peoples:

- The clergy shared the expectation of their congregations that they would be the Martin Luther King Day preacher and they would be the facilitator of all trainings on race, racial justice and racism because they were Black. The clergy pushed back against this with assertiveness, ‘No. I don’t need to do that. As far as I am concerned, I am the best Black history month lesson you will ever get.’”
- “Being part of a fairly progressive denomination about inclusion, community, and tearing down walls...yet, being one of the few people of African descent, there were times where I was looked at for carrying the weight of my race, and being asked questions to represent my race, and to answer for or to talk for and to represent, as if we were a monolithic people.”
- “Being only one of a few Black ministers serving as the senior, this creates a lot of pressure, as a lot of eyes are on you.”

Two of the Black clergy described discerning call, one left and is discerning whether to ever return to predominately White churches:

- “They are well meaning loving people who need help in understanding that becoming more diverse requires cultural change inside the congregation. Personally, it is at times frustrating, encouraging, and makes me angry. I have considered quitting more than once. Then I am reminded of my call and I can’t leave it. It doesn’t mean I won’t change my setting. If they can’t get it together

where they can be inclusive it may mean that my ministry doesn't happen inside a congregation."

After describing a very painful experience, the clergy person said they are currently "serving" in an agency that is related to experiences in ministry. She volunteered these words:

- I don't know if I am going to end back at a church. I don't know. It is part of my discernment process now. I don't know if I will serve a predominately White congregation." I have tried and tried to find a multicultural Black church. I think this patriarchy is still in the church.

In this section, some miscellaneous experiences they described will be shared:

- "There is a lot that along the experience that is definitely about my being Black. There is an equal amount in terms of my congregation being predominately White. What are our mutual assumptions; both valid and invalid we make about each other. There is also the gender issue. There is so much tied up in gender identity of a Black minister. There are things I can say in the pulpit that my Black female colleagues couldn't dream of saying. And likewise, there are positions they can take that I can't take. And it is completely about our identity as Black people. I mean, it is a mess."
- This clergy had some freedom in his congregation due to the concurrent event of denominational White supremacy training and their candidacy weekend: "My first sermon, the first thing folks heard me preach about was the violence of the 'N' word. I used the 'N' word in the pulpit knowing full-well that this had never been



done and probably would never be done again, except I did. I used it in the context of quoting Huckleberry Finn and saying this is the literature that is taught as a classic in the USA and out of the 365 pages, this word appears on 240 something of them. You realize that this is just vernacular. In any case, it is a massive privilege that I have to be able to preach and teach a sermon like that.”

- I was pastoring in a rural community where no one looked like [them]...big trucks with confederate flags.
- In the question of experiences of racism, a clergy said, “Nothing overt, other than one time I was in my office and I noticed someone was circling around the town center in a pickup truck. I don’t know if that was directed at me, but I thought how unusual this is happening.
- This is an area where we are at the belt buckle of the Republican Party in the state. It’s been a conservative area. Folks raised with lots of issues, people in two large denomination groups: Church of Christ and Southern Baptist. They have been beat up about that and some of them were going to get kicked out and some got kicked out. So, they have those issues [gay] and other things that goes with it, while they still have all of their connections, because many of them have been raised here or have lived here forever. I call it, ‘the friendly gay racism.’ I would tell them, ‘Look because you don’t call me the ‘N’ word doesn’t mean you don’t have or know racist intent.’
- ...the church moved from one location to another. It wasn’t a lot of people of color in the congregation. At that point the senior thought maybe the smart thing to do was to ask me to be the associate pastor, which I think he did because I was

Black...it's been my belief that when somebody new walks in a church if they don't see themselves somewhere in the leadership upfront, they won't be coming back. At that time, there were maybe one or two other consistent people of color that attended the church. By the time I left, they had about 15-20 African American people, maybe more.

- There were times where I have been proud of my congregation moving out and stepping out, and being the congregational life that says, get out on the street and work. We are out there making our bodies and our voices seen and heard. It's kind of a mix, It's not all one thing, not one experience.
- Serving as an associate, "Since we had a very different skill mix and gift set, there were things that I did to keep things moving forward. The other person was more outward facing. They were seen as the leader of the congregation and I think there were some conversations that only they could have as a White man talking to a predominately White congregation. There were conversations that I could have as an African American that would be better than them. Some of those instances we worked things out really well. Some instances I left disappointed, as there being a problem and the individuals who were part of the problem, that conversation I didn't feel like I could have. That's the experience, feeling disappointed to hopefulness and everything in between."
- My thought is that the congregation really appreciates, I think the congregation I serve delights in difference. Being able to expose them to things, and folks say this all the time, 'I would have never thought to read that' or 'I am not sure I would have gone there if you hadn't taken me there,' speaking of different places.

Q2. Have you had any experiences of racism serving in the congregation? If yes, what have you experienced and how did you address it? A recurring theme with the clergy was their ability to address the racism directly, even in situations that were contentious.

- In discussing micro aggressions (MA), I was told that the notion of MA is not real, and people need to stop being so sensitive. Gave an example, ‘Are you suggesting that I should just get tougher?’ He said, ‘Yes.’
- An overt situation that occurred, I was newly arrived, I had dreadlocks at the time. It was concerning. There used to be a [event] that was held at church. The person who organized that, I had not met them in person. It was moved out of the church to make way for a really wonderful program to support [an outreach program]. Then when I met this person in person, the first thing they said to me, looking at my hair, ‘My, what interesting hair you have.’ That’s before the name, that’s before hello and that’s before everything else. To which my response was, ‘Hello. My name is []. I am the minister of the church. Can I help you.’ And she couldn’t get over my hair, which was reiterated in the next comment, and she made some snide comment how the church will consider bringing the [event] back, and I was very clear, ‘Probably not. Thank you very much,’ and walked away. I mean I have experienced a ton of racism in settings where I wasn’t the minister, but in church settings where I was the minister. A series which all involved my hair. It’s like, can you people get over my hair?
- I had just been welcomed at my home congregation...I was just finishing up seminary and announced to the congregation, and immediately after the sermon I went into the social hour area and this woman comes up to me and had to reach out to do it, and ruffles my hair and says, ‘Good job.’ That was the last time I

went to that church and they also did not ordain me. I said, 'I don't want you to sponsor me anymore.' I pulled my sponsor from that church.

- As someone being in a position of authority, I feel like I am being who I am, as someone with prior experience...from being in law enforcement. It helps me to deal with people in a particular way that may be more forceful than others or bringing that forcefulness with compassion. Being amongst a choir member, who was in rehearsal right before Sunday morning worship. They were talking about...I mean the big conversation among the choir is, 'What are we going to wear?' As the conversation went, an older person of European descent...a gentleman in his 70's says, 'You know if I have to see black (clothing) one more time, I am going to lose my mind.' The choir director who is African American, me and others in the room stopped, and looked at the individual. There was this awkward silence for a few minutes. I finally just said, I called his name and said, 'You may want to rethink that position and what you said in this room at this particular time.' He said, 'Well, what do you mean?' I said, 'Well just think about what you said and who you just said it to.' He thought and then he became very apologetic. 'Well, I didn't mean it that way.' 'Just think about what you're saying. The words coming out of your mouth have an effect and they have meaning.'
- Being on a Zoom call during the pandemic, we were going beyond the scope of our little congregation, but more global with our denomination. We are on a Zoom call with people from all over the world and a person of African descent says, 'I have experienced racism in this way, as a Black pastor.' All of the oxygen gets sucked out of the room. Unfortunately, the facilitator wasn't able to bring the

conversation around to lean into what the person was saying and move through [personal name]. Another person of African descent did say something and quite forcefully to address the caller.

- The people who get on my last nerve around racism, trying to speak for me or trying to, I don't know if I can use this term, but erase it if I can't, Whitesplain. What I am saying in a meeting and trying to tell somebody, 'Well, I think what Rev. means is this.' And me coming back to say, 'Well, actually I said what I meant. This is what I said. I said what I meant, and you don't need to explain it. If someone has a question, they can ask me I am right here.' Then I'm a problem because I stood up for myself.
- On my first Sunday, they had no fellowship. This is how I knew they were inflexible. I had to wait for the monthly fellowship. If I were a White male, this would have never happened.

The clergy experienced backlash from their congregants and were challenged when wanting to get support from within the Black community, due to the isolation. What is offensive about this experience, the clergy person expressed their feeling of isolation and loneliness to the pastoral relations committee, which is considered confidential, looking for support. The next Sunday dressed in their robe and stole they were confronted by a congregant:

- I am not comfortable with any pastor of mine going to Black Lives Matter or NAACP meetings. I don't want my pastor bringing this racist group to my church." They told the congregant, "You don't get to tell me what I can do in my spare time."

On looking for a position:

- I came with a boat load of human service experience, a church's dream, hospital, nursing home, prison ministry, all of these I have done professionally, as well as a church volunteer. I had churches tell me they were specifically looking for a person of color and ended up hiring White men. One place in Ohio brought me and a Latina. They didn't hire either one of us. What the chair of the committee told me, 'If I could have smushed the two of you together, you would have made the perfect candidate.' They wanted to start a 4:00pm service to reach communities of color who did not attend their morning service. They hired a White man. Another church hired a young White guy right out of seminary with no experience and had not finished his ordination exams, which meant he could not do communion, baptism, and could not moderate a meeting. He was hired. At the church where I was hired, that person was making more money than me. As an African American minister with three calls, after that job has come with a pay decrease.
- If you do not use inclusive the language in this song, we will not use it. It has been 20 years since we have gone inclusive language. I am no longer willing to have conversations about why we have to use inclusive language. It's not about what's right and wrong. You won't do special music.

Q3. What have you already done in your congregation around issues of race and racism?

- I have done a lot, but I will say this much, it's really important to understand, I had to make it clear that my agenda around race is going to look very different from theirs. White UUs are notorious for wanting to be anti-racist, multicultural, and I am very quick to say to them that you do know that it is going to look very

different when it is coming from someone who is brown skinned. They never thought of that. My education or my work with them has been around really helping them understand my perspective.

When the Black clergy person became associate:

- They started looking at diversity, you know, that's the code word, and at the time was actually a group in [location] that was all Black, and they were invited to come into the church to talk about how to be more aware of things you say, and things you do. That was really the only thing that they did that was intentional while I was there.

In speaking to the team on issues of race:

- You know, you want me to be involved with the racial equity work, but the work you are asking me to support is not work I think is valuable to you or to this end of being anti-racist. I want you to actually go out there and make some friends. Get to know some people. I said to them, 'You will never know what it is like to walk in my skin. The closest you can get is getting to know me. And, you will never know what's it like.' I had the experience at [Ivy league college] of being followed by security store owners because I look young. I guess I am blessed because I look young, but that is no reason to be following me around. And one of the women in the meeting said, 'But, we want to help you.' I said to her, 'But you can't. So why don't you help yourself?' I am very upfront.
- Our congregation has worked with the curriculum, UU Beloved Conversations. It is an opportunity for congregations to get to know more about their racial

landscape, as an individual and as a congregation. I arrived, and the leaders in my congregation said, 'We are going to do Beloved Conversations now that you are here.' I am like, 'I am not going to be any part of that! I am the sole Black person up in there and I am the minister. A recipe for disaster.' I think they were all taken aback. 'Sorry, but you assumed wrong.' And they pushed it through and decided to do it. Then they did it a second year. I had a debrief with them after the second year, 'So how was that?' They're like, 'Yeah we probably weren't ready for it.' I know. That's what I said. Now the question is, are you ready to receive my leadership.

- We had the workshop on microaggressions. We had the 8-week conversation on White supremacy. I would say that primarily the work I do is in the sermons and the sermon topic that I choose. To be honest, I am sure my congregation would prefer if I did more, speak more about race and racism and that's not just something I really want to do. I have more than topics on race. I can't be the...I want to talk about a range of topics.
- ...one of the pastors in our denomination nearby came to our church and we invited other MCC churches to come and bring people. We had a three-hour session about White work, the work White people need to do around racism. There is greater difficulty in getting people of European descent to education opportunities around racism in this particular environment for some reason.

Q4. What learning resources or support do you desire to help you in your ministry setting around race and racism?

- Going into the denomination to offer congregations trainings. At this level, they have to be committed to this work, not just race, but gender and LGBT.



- A speed-reading course so I can read these books faster! Personally, as I am doing my own work, I can't help someone in their work until I've got to build in my own work. There are so many resources. I am reading five books right now at the same time.
- One thing our denomination did, and I am going to try and export it to my congregation is the, 21-Day Racism Challenge. You get an email every day. You have something you can read...a video or a questionnaire.
- ...region has a kind of social justice component to it, an office that would provide all sorts of resources...they have a specialist on anti-racism, and they will go out to your congregation to figure out where you need to be. I think we will need to call upon them at some point because our social justice ministry identified three problems we want to work on this year. First one, being the election and we are doing that now in the next two weeks. Then after that we want to look at how we engage with Black Lives Matter. That might be the point when we want to call in this specialist to give some advice on that. There is a willingness and there are resources available to us.
- I think I would like to see language, some intentional workshops around the language to use when you're in multicultural congregations. I think it is important. The words you use have power. Sometimes, people aren't aware of what they are saying. And book studies or things like that which will bring together the people to talk and to share, and to be vulnerable, to be open, as well as have spaces where White people can talk with White people and Black people

can talk with Black people. I think there are spaces where, as a Black person, I am just not going to say in front of a White person.

- A network of progressive Black clergy, a really like intentional nation-wide network of Black clergy who are connected to progressive faith movements. I was talking to a young Black minister here who struggles with this, being isolated...

Q5. What is your experience, if any, of positive psychology?

- A great deal. I find it useless.
- I don't have experience in what you described, but I am a big believer in strength's finders as an instrument, as a tool. I see some linkages...in strength finders in terms of working together focusing on and knowing what your strengths are in the field. Whatever the foundation of positive psychology is for getting into this flow area would be a good.
- I am not really sure because I am not sure if you are speaking of positive psychology, as this specific psychosocial lens or in a general sense.

## Summary of Results

Research revealed that Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations experience subtle and blatant forms of racism. Their experiences are not all negative, as some clergy have used the experiences as learning opportunities for the congregation. These congregations are those that are open to curiosity and learning from difference. Because of this culture of openness, the Clergy are thriving in these congregations. The research data also revealed that some of the congregations are not willing nor ready to have conversations about race and racism. In these ministry settings the Black clergy experiences were anything but life-giving. The situation can be so devastating, that the clergy leave the ministry or think about

leaving often. Many of the clergy expressed concern for the lack of denominational support when situations in their congregations become racialized. The Black clergy believe training is necessary for denominational leadership.

The research results revealed that a resource is needed to support the ministry of the Black Clergy. The majority of the clergy want a collegial resource, such as a support group consisting of other Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations. Regardless of the denomination, the clergy believe they are not in need of training, as they live this experience and have learned to navigate get every day of their lives. The only exception was a training which would assist them in expectations around culturally serving in a predominately White congregation.

The majority of the Black clergy have had no experience of positive psychology and do not understand how it would be helpful around issues of race and racism. Unfortunately, there were no completed surveys in the account on the VIA Strengths website.

## Chapter Four: Positive Psychology/Positive Organizational Scholarship as a Resource for Mission-Driven Multicultural Congregational Ministry

As the research results revealed, some predominately White congregations, which called a Black clergy person, avoided the topics, trainings and taking advantage of useful resources around race, and racism. As their clergy explained, “They aren’t ready.” Even those who thought they were ready and held studies on race and racism on their own, told their Black clergy, “We weren’t ready.”

The churches which avoided training and discussing race and racism, their clergy experienced negative situations, especially resisting their leadership. These experiences happened even if the goal of the congregation was to bring a Black clergy specifically to be a “change agent” or even when they voted unanimously to call the Black clergy person. Mark R. McMinn, as mentioned above, claims that most Christians believe God will alleviate our pain and suffering.<sup>58</sup> Pain and suffering can be alleviated if one does the work around what is causing the pain.

Congregations cannot avoid the topic of race and racism, which will cause discomfort, especially if predominately White congregations call a Black clergy person. Isabel Wilkerson, in *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* writes about the one lone person who did not raise his hand in salute to Adolf Hitler, “...unless people are willing to transcend their fears, endure discomfort and derision, suffer the scorn of loved ones and neighbors and co-workers and friends, fall into disfavor of perhaps everyone they know, face exclusion and even banishment, it would be numerically impossible, humanly impossible, for everyone to be that man.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> McMinn, *The Science of Virtue*, 165.

<sup>59</sup> Wilkerson, *Caste*, xvii.

Positive psychology focuses on what is life-giving to individuals and in organizations. Seeing the Black clergy person in a predominately White congregation through a lens of positivity, not focusing on what is negative, not avoiding the challenges of race and the discomfort, but looking at the clergy as an asset to building a diverse and inclusive congregation will bring new life to the congregation.

It is not the purpose of this project to go in depth around the myriad of issues around race and racism. Then again, it cannot be avoided. This chapter will call upon the study of race theory from Thandeka's *Learning to Be White* and the work of the editors, Laura Morgan Roberts, Lynn Perry Wooten and Martin N. Davidson in *Positive Organizing in a Global Society: Understanding and Engaging Differences for Capacity Building and Inclusion*. These editors have drawn upon the contributions of forty-five researchers, academics and policy makers in positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship, organizational leadership and development, inclusion and diversity, and cultural change in organizations.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the theories of positive leadership will be taken from Kim S. Cameron's *Practicing Positive Leadership: Tools and Techniques that Create Extraordinary Results*, will be viewed from the position of improving the experiences of Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations.

#### Positive Psychology/Positive Organizational Scholarship

According to Roberts, et al., there is a gap in the research of positive psychology focusing on race and ethnicity. They argue that there is a need for more studies and the “mobilizing of factors” to support the thriving of racial and ethnic minorities in organizations, for example,

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<sup>60</sup> Laura Morgan Roberts, Lynn Perry Wooten, and Martin N. Davidson, eds., *Positive Organizing in a Global Society: Understanding and Engaging Differences for Capacity Building and Inclusion*, First Edition (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

taking into account the history and structural systemic racism embedded in American society.<sup>61</sup>

As evidenced by the research results of the study, this need extends to predominately White congregations who call Black clergy, as race, generally is addressed from a deficit approach. positive psychology/positive organizational scholarship can view race and inclusion not only in the acknowledgement of difference, but through the lens of the Black clergy person in a predominately White congregation as an asset that is beneficial to the church.<sup>62</sup>

According to Roberts, et al., "...creating and engaging with inclusion requires becoming more comfortable with discomfort, both individually and collectively." And "...a minority racial identity in the workplace – though it is often associated with significant stereotyping, bias, and discrimination – can have a silver lining for those who view that identity as a resource."<sup>63</sup> When congregations desire to create and sustain a multicultural church, positive psychology/positive organizational scholarship is a strength-based tool which can move the conversation of race from acknowledging difference to one of cultivating that difference as an asset which builds a diverse inclusive congregation which thrives.<sup>64</sup>

As seen in the experience of the research participant having a positive experience, they are an example of how their presence as a racial minority is an asset or resource for the congregation. They state, "My thought is that the congregation delights in difference. Congregants express, 'I am not sure I would have gone there if you hadn't taken me there...'" Although, not without some minor challenges, this Black clergy person is having a positive experience in their congregation. The goal of a congregational resource would be to help the

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<sup>61</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, *Positive Organizing*, 18.

<sup>62</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 34–35.

<sup>64</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 21.

congregation to “engage with and truly face differences” that come with welcoming their Black clergy person and diversity, as well as capitalizing on the clergy’s presence as an asset and resource for thriving.<sup>65</sup>

Abraham H. Maslow claims, if the physiological and safety needs of an individual are met, then one will search for belonging, “a place in his group.”<sup>66</sup> For the Black clergy person or those who are a member of the non-dominant group, in a predominately White congregation, there is often a feeling of the safety need and belonging needs not being met. Therefore, the clergy will not be able to reach a point of self-actualization in their ministry setting, according to Maslow’s theory, nor thrive in their congregational setting. Positive organizational scholarship addresses one’s authenticity in relationship to their expression of culture in an organization. Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations navigate experiences where their way of expressing themselves is questioned. One research participant termed the environment in the church as a, “racially charged environment” and what Roberts, et al. call, “...sometimes subtle or ambiguous race-related dynamics that surface during everyday work activities.”<sup>67</sup> For example, one research participant’s hair became an issue for White people in their congregation and within the denomination. They experienced a congregant making multiple comments regarding their loced hair, “My, what interesting hair you have.” Or a White woman ruffling the locs of a Black male clergy person and say, “Good job!”

One must remember, it is never appropriate to touch someone’s body nor hair without their consent. This is a violation of one’s person and a safety issue for Black clergy serving in

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<sup>65</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 68.

<sup>66</sup> Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*, 14.

<sup>67</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 31.

predominately White congregations who present in the authenticity of their culture. Roberts, et al. define, authenticity in as, "...behaving consistently with what one believes and how one feels. A core component of being authentic is living up to one's personal values because values are central to how we define ourselves."<sup>68</sup> This is where the Black clergy encountered challenges from the congregation members.

Expressions of authenticity can be instances of the clergy wearing their hair in locs, braids, dressed in traditional African garb, artifacts displayed in their office, and ways of speaking. Roberts, et al. claim, "Our personal values drive our behavior, judgement, self-actualization; and presentation of self, and are typically associated with upbringing, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. In essence, personal values are central to how we define ourselves."<sup>69</sup> In a congregation that is predominately White, a Black clergy person expressing their authentic self can be a challenge when their values in appearance do not match the dominant culture of the congregation.

In positive psychology/positive organizational scholarship the expression of these values by Black clergy and the diverse persons in the congregation has the potential for growth and thriving if viewed through a positive lens. When the positive organizational scholarship lens is used as a tool in the church seeking diversity, it encourages the expression of the authentic self. In this the organization members experience well-being from the expression of authenticity. Roberts, et al. claim, "Given the opportunity, employees are likely to attribute the positive results

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<sup>68</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 56.

<sup>69</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 53.



they experience from authenticity (e.g., positive self-regard, adaptive functioning, and well-being) to their organizations.”<sup>70</sup>

This experience of well-being is central to positive psychology’s theory on positive connections. Kate Heffron and Ilona Boniwell in *Positive Psychology: Theory, Research and Applications* claim from well-being research in PP, “...when we build connections with people around us, we experience higher levels of well-being as well as stronger resilience in the face of adversity.”<sup>71</sup> Named high quality connections (HQC) in positive psychology, a predominately White congregation that promotes authentic self-expression would experience “a heightened sense of vitality and aliveness, positive regard from others (i.e., feeling known and appreciated, and engagement)” by their Black clergy and those of the non-dominate culture as diversity is increased.<sup>72</sup> The addition of other cultural norms and values in the congregation will also benefit the dominant culture. The author argues, “broadening organizational norms benefits not only underrepresented minorities, but also people in the majority because of its ameliorative impact on perceived discrimination and its ability to unshackle majority members from norms that can ensnare them as well. Because perceived discrimination is most often associated with the majority, heightened majority authenticity in the workplace may provide individuating information that enhances workplace relationship for both...”<sup>73</sup>

As discovered in this research study, the Black clergy’s cultural norms were not being accepted nor celebrated. With positive organizational scholarship, expressions of their culture will no longer be subject to the assumptions, bias and prejudices held by the dominant group.

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<sup>70</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 60.

<sup>71</sup> Kate Heffron and Ilona Boniwell, *Positive Psychology: Theory, Research and Applications*, Kindle Edition (Maidenhead: Open Univ. Press, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 60.

<sup>73</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 61.

The clergy will become a point of positivity and belonging, which will bring forth the thriving of the clergy, as well the congregation. “In many ways...creating and engaging with inclusion ‘requires becoming more comfortable with discomfort both individually and collectively. When we practice inclusion in a diverse group or organization, we are more likely to find ourselves in situations in which we do not fully understand our counterparts, and so must cultivate the ability to not understand as well as to lean into discomfort, which can facilitate learning and engagement, as well as trust. This will require the congregation to intentionally engage across the difference in culture they find with their Black clergy person.”<sup>74</sup>

### Positive Leadership and Cultural Change

Changing culture in congregations can be slow and difficult. Understanding the foundation of resistance as fear of loss, one is better able to recognize what is happening in a predominately White congregation who call a Black clergy person. According to Kim S. Cameron, in *Practicing Positive Leadership: Tools and Techniques that Create Extraordinary Results* regarding resistance to change, “Deeply held beliefs and assumptions are challenged, not to mention the disruption of interpersonal relationships, power and status, and routine ways of behaving in organizations.”<sup>75</sup> We can see this in the experience of one research participant who wanted to increase opportunities for more congregational fellowship other than once a month. They were confronted by a congregant who said, “...you are not going to talk about my church this way. It’s a loving community.” Cultural change is usually interpreted as a negative

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<sup>74</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 68.

<sup>75</sup> Kim S Cameron, *Practicing Positive Leadership: Tools and Techniques That Create Extraordinary Results*, Kindle Edition (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013), 30.

condition, so resistance is likely.” The role of the positive leader is to overcome resistance and change it into positive energy.<sup>76</sup>

In predominately White congregations who seek to increase diversity, by calling a Black clergy person, making cultural changes in observable behaviors, artifacts or symbols will be one of the first places of intentional change, as these are easiest. Kim S. Cameron asserts, “...artifacts are manifestations of culture that are more observable and overt, such as the buildings in which we live, the clothes we wear, the entertainment we enjoy, and the logos, flags, graffiti, and decorations we use to identify ourselves.”<sup>77</sup> One can observe from the research data from the interviews, that Kim S. Cameron’s theory on observable culture is accurate. In one predominately White congregation, the leadership recognized an increase in attendance by Black people. The minister of music, who is White recognized the need. The Black clergy person started a gospel choir. “I think that was a turning point in the life of the church.” This turning point is understandable, as Kim S. Cameron believes, “...these kinds of changes do not signal a cultural shift, but they begin the process of deeper and more fundamental culture change. The challenge for positive leaders is to ensure that these initial efforts to establish abundance become embedded and institutionalized, so that culture change actually occurs. The sustainability of abundance is the goal.”<sup>78</sup>

Kim S. Cameron claims, “Culture is largely invisible until it is challenged or contradicted.”<sup>79</sup> In positive leadership, and the “culture of abundance,” a congregational leader first focuses on “creating readiness” to change through intentional language to bring about

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<sup>76</sup> Cameron, *Practicing Positive Leadership*, 30.

<sup>77</sup> Cameron, 21.

<sup>78</sup> Cameron, 22.

<sup>79</sup> Cameron, 20.

positive motivation instead of fear which leads to resistance.<sup>80</sup> For example, using the language of the local congregation as “family” can come with assumptions regarding who belongs. The language of community implies a more open membership which can be more inclusive of difference.

In the research data is an example of how being intentional around language and race was important when increased diversity happened in a predominately White congregation. This Black clergy person expressed a need for, “intentional workshops around language to use when you’re in a multicultural congregation.” One can agree with Kim S. Cameron and this research participant when hearing of the experience of a Black clergy who heard a White congregant say, “If I see black one more time, I am going to lose my mind” when referencing the constant wearing of black by the choir. Of course, one understands the person had no ill intent in their statement, but as the Black clergy explained, “...the words coming out of your mouth have an effect and they have meaning.”

According to Kim S. Cameron, “At the very foundation of culture lies human virtues – what all human beings consider to be right and good, and what allow human beings to be their very best.”<sup>81</sup> The virtues come with implicit assumptions. Freedom, justice, compassion, kindness, faith, charity, courage and love are among the attributes that all human beings assume to be right and good. Implicit assumptions give rise to social contracts and norms.” “These are the conventions and procedures that govern how humans interact – including rules of etiquette,

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<sup>80</sup> Cameron, 29.

<sup>81</sup> Cameron, 20.

civility, and courtesy.”<sup>82</sup> As the foundation of culture, these virtues are last to change and will meet resistance.

With a goal of cultural change, which is necessary to sustain a diverse multicultural congregation, the predominately White congregation will be required to look at their implicit assumptions. “Positive leaders know that a cultural change has occurred when members of the organization begin to think in new ways, change their paradigms or the categories they use to make sense of their environments, alter the meaning associated with their activities...”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Cameron, 20.

<sup>83</sup> Cameron, 22.

## Chapter Five: Theology, Biblical Scholarship, Christianity and Positive Psychology

As a woman of faith, a preacher and teacher, and one who studies biblical scholarship, it is at times, difficult to reconcile the evil of racism and racist acts and the positive nature of the strengths and virtues, as motivators of moral behavior and flourishing. It has been theorized that when individuals and organizations collectively engage in their strengths and function with a model of positive organizational scholarship, flourishing is possible. Seligman's strengths or the virtues are what causes a person to be good and do good. One can assume that the majority of people of faith in predominately White congregations are good moral virtuous people. Yet, why does the sin of racism dwell in the church, as evidenced by our Black clergy?

Assisting in understanding this conflict is in the writing of the Apostle Paul in Romans. One can find understanding of evil or undesirable behavior present in good Christian people. The duality of good and evil is present in all of humanity and cannot be ignored. David Nelson Entwistle and Stephen K. Moroney in "Integrative Perspectives on Human Flourishing, The Imago Dei and Positive Psychology" claim, "...a more complete view is needed that celebrates humans' positive features as creatures who bear the image of God, while simultaneously recognizing the pervasiveness of sin and its affects."<sup>84</sup>

In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul writes in chapter seven on the inner conflict between good and the sinful nature of humanity. It states, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this

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<sup>84</sup> David Nelson Entwistle and Stephen K Moroney, "Integrative Perspectives on Human Flourishing: The Imago Dei and Positive Psychology," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 39, no. 4 (2011): 295, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001876463&site=ehost-live&custid=s9005776>.

I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”<sup>85</sup> The final verse of this text is problematic in terms of racism. Does it excuse racist behavior as a condition of humanity’s sinful nature? Does it take away culpability for racism and its adverse outcomes?

Although Paul makes a reasonable explanation for sinful behavior, which is supported by St. Augustine of Hippo’s *Confession* where he claims humanity is sinful from birth. “Hearken, God! Alas for the sins of men! Man saith this, and Thou dost compassionate him; for Thou didst create him, but didst not create the sin that is in him. Who bringeth to my remembrance the sin of my infancy? For before Thee none is free from sin, not even the infant which has lived but a day upon the earth.”<sup>86</sup> These arguments overlook an important point about the sin of racism. We are not born racist.

#### Culture and Increased Diversity: Race and Racism – Created in the Image of God

In the book, *Learning to be White*, Thandeka, a Black woman and UU minister and theologian, writes about White identity. She theorizes, “No one is born White in America,” “The first racial victim of the White community is its own child,” and “Racist acts are sometimes not motivated by White racist sentiment but by feeling of personal shame.”<sup>87</sup>

She was asked by a college staff member where she was a professor, “what it felt like to be black.” Believing the woman was sincere in her inquiry, but not accepting that “nothing from her own background or experience could help her understand me.” “I had been assigned a race by America’s pervasive socialization process, and so had she.” Out of this conversation

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<sup>85</sup> “Oremus Bible Browser : Romans 7:14-20,” accessed January 27, 2021, <https://bible.oremus.org/>.

<sup>86</sup> of Hippo Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo* (Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark ; New York : Scribner and Welford [distributor], 1882), 8, <http://archive.org/details/theconfessions0000unse>.

<sup>87</sup> Thandeka, *Learning to Be White*, vii.

Thandeka created the “Race Game.” Those who agreed to “play” must add the word “White” when they mentioned the name of a White person. For example, “my White husband, Phil,” or “my White friend Julie.” After one week they would meet for lunch and the author would answer her question, “using terms she would understand.” Thandeka discovered quickly from her lunch partner that this game caused White people to feel uncomfortable. They never had lunch again.<sup>88</sup>

Through her research, interviewing White men and women who played the game. Thandeka learned they experienced shame while playing. Each of the research participants in her book recalled a childhood event, which defined their racial identity as White. “This event caused them to realize that one was either “colored” or “White.”<sup>89</sup> One participant, Dan stood out, as a Presbyterian minister who grew up in one of the New England states, which had few Black people. As a young child, Dan’s father would tell him, “Black people are inferior.” Much older on an eight-grade field trip to Washington, Dan encountered signs which read, “colored” and “White” on bathrooms and water fountains. He was troubled by them. But said nothing, as no one on the trip made a comment.”<sup>90</sup> Remembering the experience of the Black clergy person who was yelled at during a meeting, not one of the 10-14 White people at the table spoke up to defend their pastor. Is it possible like Dan they too had “...buried the troubled feelings” of what they were witnessing out of fear?<sup>91</sup>

In 1950, as a college student, Dan joined a fraternity. He convinced his chapter to pledge a Black student. When national headquarters learned they threatened their charter if the Black student was not expelled. The fraternity gave in and selected Dan to tell the student. It is at this

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<sup>88</sup> Thandeka, 3.

<sup>89</sup> Thandeka, 8.

<sup>90</sup> Thandeka, 9.

<sup>91</sup> Thandeka, 7.



point that Dan began to cry. “I felt so ashamed of what I did. I have carried this burden for forty years. I will carry it to my grave.”<sup>92</sup> Thandeka, “felt empathy for his suffering but was troubled by his lack of courage. Dan’s tears revealed the depth of the compromise he had made with himself rather than risk venturing beyond the socially mandated strictures of Whiteness...being White for Dan was not a matter of racist conviction but a matter of survival, not a privilege but a penalty...the internal price exacted from him for his ongoing membership in the ‘White’ race as psychic tension and discomfort.” The author called what Dan felt “agony.” One can call it moral agony, when one refuses “to risk exile...to retain membership in his own community of caretakers and peers.” Thandeka writes, “He cried because his impulses to moral action had been slain by his own fear of racial exile.”<sup>93</sup>

She has proposed a theory which exposes an inner conflict around White identity, which she calls a “civil war.” Similar to what the Apostle Paul writes in Romans, it is a conflict “by a self against self in order to stop feeling what it is not supposed to feel: forbidden desires and prohibited feelings that render one different...one feels shame as in the feeling that, ‘I am unlovable.’” Thandeka believes, “the Euro-American child defends itself by creating a White racial identity for itself. It begins to think and act like its community’s ideal of a White self.”<sup>94</sup>

Thandeka’s interviews revealed a color-blindness or silence in the participants as being White, and a disconnect from their authentic self and their core values, which was due to an event(s) of racial socialization, which resulted in shame, as perpetuated by the child’s family of origin and continued on into adulthood. Reminded of the works of therapist, Dana Crowley Jack

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<sup>92</sup> Thandeka, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Thandeka, 8–9.

<sup>94</sup> Thandeka, 12–13.

from her book, *Silencing the Self: Women and Depression*, Thandeka claims, “This silence reminded me of the ubiquitous fears and ‘collective sense of being at risk...They muffled their feelings of anger and resentment and thus, in effect, ‘stifled themselves’ in order to avoid the threat of annihilation, conceal their feelings of unlovability, or hide those feelings and perceptions that they believed, if revealed, would be judged ‘wrong.’”<sup>95</sup>

In Thandeka’s book we witness a moral conflict of persons who fail to make a righteous moral decision or to act in a way that violates their core values, thus existing in authenticity of self. One must wonder, is Thandeka’s idea of the collective White shame at work in predominately White churches which have called a Black clergy? Thandeka further claims that “Collectively, these personal group values become the basis for developing ‘a way of living with characteristic codes and beliefs, standards and enemies to suit the adaptive needs of both the child and its group. When these ways of valuing are overgeneralized, however, they become prejudices against persons and groups who do not fit with this valuation scheme of things...the child cannot help but acquire the suspicions, fears, and hatred that sooner or later may fix on minority groups because of the ways the child learns these feelings: discipline, love, and threat.”<sup>96</sup>

We are not born racist. In the first creation story of Genesis the narrative reads, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”<sup>97</sup> We are created in the image of God, with the innate capacity to do good. Race is a social construct of American society; taught and reinforced within families and communities. As argued by Thandeka, “Most very young Euro-American children...have not yet learned to avoid making African American friends or

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<sup>95</sup> Thandeka, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Thandeka, *Learning to Be White*, 17.

<sup>97</sup> “Oremus Bible Browser : Genesis 1:31,” accessed January 29, 2021, <https://bible.oremus.org/>.

think of such persons as inferior. Such community values are not yet in place. The child has not yet learned the words and values that its community links...”<sup>98</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, the writer lifts love above faith and hope.<sup>99</sup> In the prior verses it reads, “For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”<sup>100</sup> According to David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor in the *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* commentary, “Paul wants the Corinthians to think eschatologically, to be endtimes oriented in their relations to one another, to love one another now in ways that reflect the love of Christ and not the sort of things that pass for love in this age.”<sup>101</sup> When today’s society says we must hate the difference we find in one another, hurt one another along racial lines and blame one another, we don’t know nor understand everything in regard to the mystery of God’s creation. We only know what we see. Often times, we look at ourselves and each other dimly. Until we can truly see God in each other, the imago Dei, let us simply love about all else.

#### Positive Psychology/Positive Organizational Scholarship Training Resource

If predominately White churches are going to call Black clergy to serve as senior clergy or associate, I recommend that a denominational-wide resource be created to certify White congregations to call Black clergy, a process similar to the UCC’s Open and Affirming

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<sup>98</sup> Thandeka, *Learning to Be White*, 25.

<sup>99</sup> “Oremus Bible Browser : 1 Corinthians 13:13,” accessed January 29, 2021, <https://bible.oremus.org/>.

<sup>100</sup> “Oremus Bible Browser : 1 Corinthians 13:9-12,” accessed January 29, 2021, <https://bible.oremus.org/>.

<sup>101</sup> David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Kindle (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008)

designation. This process can assist in preventing what has been seen from the clergy who were studied here, often painful and negative circumstances. As a Black clergy said, “It’s difficult and it shouldn’t be.” This resource would be the beginning of the discernment process for calling a Black clergy to a predominately White congregation with an intentional mission of creating and sustaining a multicultural congregation. As the research revealed and asserted by a participant, “No church should bring a pastor of color as the senior if they have not been through training.”

In the congregational setting, this would mean having the expressed intention of recruiting and calling a Black clergy person to this mission-driven strategy. The entire congregation would function through a diversity lens and positive psychology/positive organizational scholarship. All congregational leadership would be committed to building an inclusive congregational culture, which would focus on the thriving of the Black clergy person and the entire congregation as diversity increases.

Part of the training program would include discussions on the foundations of race theory and racism in America. According to the literature reviewed for this study, and the conversations with the Black clergy conversations and trainings around race, racism, and anti-racist training should be facilitated by outside trained individuals.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

### Research Implications for the Church

Churches must recognize the paradigm shift that has happened in American society. America has become a global society with technology leading our ability to connect across races, ethnicities and cultures. Juana Bordas asserts, "...globalization is fueling diversity. The world is fast becoming a virtual community, where a technological network connects us like next-door neighbors."<sup>102</sup> This shift has affected community demographics, thus the Church. Some churches find themselves in communities they no longer recognize with membership dwindling and eventually closing.

In Taylor Billings Russell's blog, "Vital Signs and Statistics," he discusses the findings from Rev. David Schoen's publication, "Facing your Church's Uncertain Future," Russell reported on the UCC, "One hundred congregations closed from 1995 through 1999; one hundred thirty-six congregations closed from 2006-2010 and one hundred forty-one congregations from 2014 – 2018." Russell believes the closures signal a call for, "Increased options for sharing legacies to empower future missional faith communities," as well "Increased encouragement of revisioning and new ministries creating future communities of faith."<sup>103</sup> Churches with a stated mission of building and sustaining a multicultural congregation by intentionally calling a Black clergy person can experience a new future in their community.

Increasingly, predominately White congregations are calling Black clergy to serve as senior pastor. In this study the majority of the reasons for calling a Black pastor was in response to a desire for diversity, to outreach to a community that is predominately people of color or

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<sup>102</sup> Bordas, *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit*, 5.

<sup>103</sup> "New Data on Church Closures," *Vital Signs and Statistics* (blog), February 3, 2020, <https://carducc.wordpress.com/2020/02/03/new-data-on-church-closures/>.

diverse in other ways. The congregations believe the presence of a Black clergy person will create a multicultural congregation filled with diversity. The congregations must consider carefully the implications and not arbitrarily call a Black clergy person. It has a high risk of harm to the Black clergy.

It is equally important for predominately White congregations and their denominations to know that a mission of creating and sustaining a multicultural congregation is possible, with intentionality. These congregations can be an answer to Russel's call above, especially for predominately White congregations in people of color communities. There are examples in this study of Black clergy who have experienced success in their congregation. They welcomed increased diversity and became a multicultural congregation. These experiences are beneficial to predominately White congregations who are currently navigating congregational life with a Black clergy person.

Despite challenges at times in accepting the leadership of their pastor, some of these congregations have welcomed their Black clergy with curiosity, openness to learning, and receiving constructive feedback. These pastors must be celebrated for their courage, assertiveness in addressing race and racism, and for their resilience continuing to navigate the issues that come with being a Black clergy person in a predominately White congregation. One of the research participants in this study has left the church and one still considers leaving, but says, "...at times it is frustrating and encouraging, makes me angry and I have considered quitting more than once and then I am reminded of my call and I can't leave it."

The research participants in this study have revealed the importance of not calling a Black clergy person. Participant number one has claimed, "No church should bring a pastor of color as the senior if they have not been through that training (Welcome and Affirming)." A

predominately White congregation should not consider a Black clergy person for candidacy if they have not been prepared to discuss race and racism, how issues will manifest in the congregation around race, and being able to acknowledge race as a significant factor in the congregation, and it must not be ignored, and the pastor's race must not be ignored.

Denominational leadership should be heavily involved with the local predominately White congregation if they are considering calling a Black clergy person. The clergy interviewed for this project all agree, congregations and denominations need training. This project exposed the need for a training program of "discernment" for calling a Black clergy person, as the majority of the research participants were not fortunate to have an experience in which they would call positive. The research revealed there are common patterns the clergy experience in navigating difference in terms of culture, issues of disrespect, and resistance to their leadership.

Central to the issues of calling a Black clergy person to a predominately White congregation, Juana Bordas asks, "How do we help people deal with their deepest differences?"<sup>104</sup> For predominately White congregations who desire to call a Black clergy person to increase diversity or reach out to the community, this research will inform the local church of the ways in which they can push back against and resist the leadership of their minister, as this is one of the most common experiences of the clergy.

The research shows that the Church can call a Black clergy person with intentionality, but with the absolute support of the denomination when issues in the congregation become racialized. This is especially important for those clergy who serve in rural areas. The clergy

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<sup>104</sup> Bordas, *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit*, 5.

indicated a need for a support system. They need a support system of other Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations or people from Black community organizations.

Referencing the research results, participant number three expressed “a net positive experience” with his congregation. The ability of the congregation to “appreciate and delight in difference” as their pastor exposes them to experiences and concepts they would never have if their pastor were White. This is an example how engaging their strengths and viewing their Black clergy as an asset in the congregation has impacted their pastor’s experience positively.

In the Gospel of John in Jesus’ high priestly prayer, he prayed for the future church. His desire was for the body of Christ to be unified, to be one as he and God are one.<sup>105</sup> The early church was made up of diverse communities. These communities struggled in relationship with one another due to their differences. There is nothing new under the sun. The Church still struggles with difference. And we continue the tradition of Jesus’ prayer. Jesus not only prayed that we would be one, but he also prayed, “that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” In the current history of humanity, the world is in need of God’s unconditional love that calls each of us by name.

#### Further Research Study

Roberts, et al. have expressed the need for future research in, “building theory-driven models that illustrate the processes leading to the development of strategies people can employ for authentic engagement in the workplace...it will be critical to address interpersonal and work-related dynamics, as well as the perceived risk and other potential tensions that might arise when individuals choose to weave some of their core values into their work environments.”<sup>106</sup> The

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<sup>105</sup> “Oremus Bible Browser: John 17:20-23.”

<sup>106</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 56.



negative experiences of the Black clergy in this study, revealed the need for training program to ensure a safe environment for the clergy. Nevertheless, the Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations are in need of tools immediately.

An area of further study, which has been identified by Roberts, Wooten and Davis, as a gap in the study of positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship, “the developing of strategies people can employ for authentic engagement in the workplace”<sup>107</sup> An ethnographic study exploring the cultural norms and values in predominately White congregations juxtaposed with those of the Black clergy person. The purpose would be to understand how culture affects the relationship between the Black clergy and the congregation. In addition, to develop positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship and positive leadership strategies and practical training tools for congregations for the fostering of a safe environment for the Black clergy and a positive congregational setting. Roberts, et al. identified “the development of tools for training organizations on how to foster safe environments in which members can honor their true selves. Such tools must center on facilitating authenticity among all organizational members...especially among those who bring divergent perspectives and values to the workplace.”<sup>108</sup> One must recognize that a “safe” space may assume a level of comfort for participants. A brave space would be preferable. It would be a space where people are able to learn without fear of judgement if they say or think the “wrong” way about race, racism or racial justice.

Another area of further research is the development of strategies for helping Black clergy, creating and/or locating an online nation-wide network for Black clergy serving in predominately White congregations. The majority of the research participants requested this resource for

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<sup>107</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 56.

<sup>108</sup> Roberts, Wooten, and Davidson, 56.

support. Research and creation of a discernment program, such as the UCC's Open and Affirming Program for congregations who want to call a Black clergy person would be a viable project to assist clergy and cause predominately White congregations to be more intentional when they desire to increase diversity.

Unfortunately, revealing the gender of the clergy was not possible due to the small sample size. Some of the Black clergy are currently serving in the predominately White congregations and needed confidentiality. However, with a larger sample size, further research comparing the experiences of Black male clergy and Black female clergy serving in predominately White congregations would be a compelling study.

### Appendix I: Survey Questions for Pastors

1. What is the average Sunday attendance?
2. Were you called with the specific intention to increase diversity? If yes, what was the reason given for increasing diversity?
3. Identify your congregation's racial-ethnic category by percentages (best estimate)
  - a. White
  - b. Black
  - c. Hispanic
  - d. Pacific Islander and/or Asian
  - e. Multiracial
4. Do you consider your congregation to be multiracial, multicultural or diverse? If yes, why? If no, Why not. Unsure
5. Is increased diversity possible based on what you know about and experience in the community the church is located? Yes, Why? No, Why not Unsure
6. Has the congregation increased in diversity? If yes, what is the percentage? If yes, do you know why and how it increased?
7. Do you have conversations about race, racism, and diversity with your congregants? Yes. No. If no, why not? If yes, do you use a resource?
8. Are you willing to have conversations about race, racism, and diversity? Yes. No. Not sure. If yes, why? If no, why not?
9. Has the congregation made any cultural changes to engage with a diverse population? Yes. No. Not sure. If yes, what changes did you make?
  - a. Changed the hymnal
  - b. Removed symbols
  - c. Added symbols
  - d. Changed liturgies to include diverse voices of other cultures, such as Native American, African American and/or Asian American, etc.
  - e. Changed worship style
  - f. Other\_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you believe specialized training is necessary for Black clergy to serve in predominantly White congregations? Yes. No. Unsure. If yes, what do you believe would be helpful in this training?

## Appendix II: Interview Questions for Clergy

1. How long have you been or were you in this ministry setting?
2. What is or has been your experience being a Black clergy person serving in a predominantly White UCC congregation?
3. Have you had any experiences of racism serving in a predominantly White UCC congregation? If yes. What have you experienced? How did you address it?
4. Prior to Covid-19 what have you already done in your congregation around issues of race and racism?
5. What learning resources or support do you desire to help you in your ministry setting around race and racism?
6. What is your experience, if any, of positive psychology?

### Appendix III: VIA Character Strength's Evaluation

1. After taking the VIA Strength's survey, what did you discover about yourself?
2. On a scale of 1-10, ten being the most, tell me how useful do you believe this survey would be in your lay leadership work in your church?
3. Would you like to learn how your core strengths can assist your leadership and your congregation in issues around race and racism?

## Appendix VI: VIA Classification of 24 Character Strengths

		The VIA Classification of 24 Character Strengths				ViaCharacter.org
WISDOM	CREATIVITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Originality</li><li>• Adaptive</li><li>• Ingenuity</li></ul>	CURIOSITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interest</li><li>• Novelty-Seeking</li><li>• Exploration</li><li>• Openness</li></ul>	JUDGMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Critical Thinking</li><li>• Thinking Things Through</li><li>• Open-mindedness</li></ul>	LOVE OF LEARNING <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mastering New Skills &amp; Topics</li><li>• Systematically Adding to Knowledge</li></ul>	PERSPECTIVE <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wisdom</li><li>• Providing Wise Counsel</li><li>• Taking the Big Picture View</li></ul>	
	COURAGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Valor</li><li>• Not Shrinking from Fear</li><li>• Speaking Up for What's Right</li></ul>	PERSEVERANCE <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Persistence</li><li>• Industry</li><li>• Finishing What One Starts</li></ul>	HONESTY <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Authenticity</li><li>• Integrity</li></ul>	ZEST <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vitality</li><li>• Enthusiasm</li><li>• Vigor</li><li>• Energy</li><li>• Feeling Alive</li></ul>		
HUMANITY	LOVE <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Both Loving and Being Loved</li><li>• Valuing Close Relations with Others</li></ul>	KINDNESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Generosity</li><li>• Nurturance</li><li>• Care &amp; Compassion</li><li>• Altruism</li><li>• "Niceness"</li></ul>			SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aware of the Motives/Feelings of Self/Others</li><li>• Knowing what Makes Other People Tick</li></ul>	
	JUSTICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Citizenship</li><li>• Social Responsibility</li><li>• Loyalty</li></ul>			FAIRNESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Just</li><li>• Not Letting Feelings Bias Decisions About Others</li></ul>	LEADERSHIP <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organizing Group Activities</li><li>• Encouraging a Group to Get Things Done</li></ul>	
TEMPERANCE		FORGIVENESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mercy</li><li>• Accepting Others' Shortcomings</li><li>• Giving People a Second Chance</li></ul>	HUMILITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Modesty</li><li>• Letting One's Accomplishments Speak for Themselves</li></ul>	PRUDENCE <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Careful</li><li>• Cautious</li><li>• Not Taking Undue Risks</li></ul>	SELF-REGULATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-Control</li><li>• Disciplined</li><li>• Managing Impulses &amp; Emotions</li></ul>	
	TRANSCENDENCE <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appreciation of BEAUTY &amp; EXCELLENCE</li><li>• Awe</li><li>• Wonder</li><li>• Elevation</li></ul>	GRATITUDE <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thankful for the Good</li><li>• Expressing Thanks</li><li>• Feeling Blessed</li></ul>	HOPE <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Optimism</li><li>• Future-Mindedness</li><li>• Future Orientation</li></ul>	HUMOR <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Playfulness</li><li>• Bringing Smiles to Others</li><li>• Lighthearted</li></ul>	SPIRITUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Religiousness</li><li>• Faith</li><li>• Purpose</li><li>• Meaning</li></ul>	

## Appendix V: Mission-Driven Strategy: Creating and Sustaining a Multicultural Congregation

### Training Program

1. God's Beloved Community: The Multicultural Church
2. Cultural: Are we Ready to Change?
3. My Pastor is Black: Being Comfortable in the Discomfort
4. Race and the Resistance to Leadership
5. History of Race: Why We are Here
6. Introduction to Positive Psychology
7. Positive Organizational Scholarship
8. Positive Leadership as a Mission Strategy
9. Are We Ready? Creating the Profile
10. We Ready? The Search and Call Process

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