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# THE LIGHT

NEWSLETTER OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH OF CLIFTON AND PASSAIC

"A Church UNITED in faith, hope, & love!"

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## A NEW WAY OF SEEING

When I was a sophomore in college, I came to realize racism infects even the most Christian of people, myself included. My parents raised me to believe that everyone was equal in the Lord's sight and they backed that up with their attitudes and actions. However, I had no firsthand experience of black people. There was not a single black child in my elementary school and the only times I saw black people were either when I watched the news, or when we drove into downtown Denver and passed through a poor, black neighborhood called "Five Points."

For three weeks during my sophomore year of college, I roomed with a young black man named Bernie. Once while riding the dorm elevator, someone asked my roommate, who was wearing a sweatshirt from the 1972 Summer Olympics, if he had gone to Munich the previous summer. He replied that his father had taken the whole family for vacation.

***I am not a racist,  
but I have been infected  
with racism.***

My first reaction was one of surprise. Without realizing it, I had stereotyped him as a poor, disadvantaged black kid from Five Points. Although consciously I believed that all are equal, unconsciously I acted as if Bernie was to be pitied because he was poor and ignorant. I say that to my own shame. In actuality, Bernie had attended a better high school than I had and his family was better off financially than my own.

This experience taught me an important lesson: "Although I am not a racist, I have been infected by racism."

We tend to define a racist as someone who has "a willful and personal animosity towards another person based solely on race." By that definition, I am not a racist. However, racism is not about animosity or even willfulness; rather it is a ***distorted way of seeing things that diminishes another person***. Left to our own devices, we think our way of seeing racial relations are normal when in fact they are distorted. To overcome racism, it is not enough to be a kind person and believe that all are equal. To overcome racism we need others show us how our vision has been distorted.

So how do we learn a new, less distorted way of seeing? We learn by listening. In the wake of the deaths of several young black men at the hands of the police a movement has sprung up called "#blacklivesmatter." Many of my friends have reacted negatively to this and said "all lives matter," which is certainly true. However, what would happen if we treat this campaign as an opportunity to learn and listen to our brothers and sisters in Christ about how hidden racism affects their daily lives? Might we not learn a new way of seeing?

In Christ's love,

*Pastor Mike*