

I See You

The title, "I See You," comes out of three months of "Food for Thought" material. Food for Thought was developed by the Committee on *Conversations in Black and White*, St. John's initiative promoting racial understanding and reconciliation to supplement and support St. John's upcoming 2017 Lenten Services. Each month the Committee provided contemporary material on racial understanding and reconciliation by written clergy and lay advocates of racial harmony. The structure supporting our Food for Thought was our Baptismal Covenant.

The first material for Food for Thought was posted in September 2016. It was an article "Black Lives Matter: Affirming God-given rights and respect" written by Osita Iroegbu and published by the Richmond Times Dispatch. On September 21st, the discussion was led by the Rev Dr. Dorothy White. The discussion focused on two key points

(1) When we say black lives matter, it does not suggest that other lives do not. It simply declares that *black and brown lives are to be valued* the same way white lives *have been valued* throughout history.

(2) We are creations of an almighty God who has a plan and a purpose for each of us. When you combine these two points it becomes extremely obvious that all lives matter including black lives.

The October Food for Thought article written by the Committee was titled "WE AND THEM." In the article the Committee pointed out that we put people in categories, the simplest is "WE" and "THEM"; you are either with me or you are against me; you are either like me or you are not like me. In part, the article was inspired by a book titled Disunity in Christ, the author, Christena Cleveland points out that we frequently differentiate ourselves even among our fellow Christians based on different practices and theology. The Committee's article focused more broadly. We tend to make the categorization quickly and use it to separate ourselves from others, be it based on race, sex, sexual orientation, gender, national origin, religion, political views, locality, the school we attended, and a myriad of other categories that do not fit our Baptismal vows of loving our neighbors as ourselves and believing in the dignity of every person. In the article the Committee challenged the reader to find broader goals that most of us value and agree with not just as Christians but as people. These goals should stretch across religious beliefs, race, sex, sexual orientation, and across other human categorizations. As People of God, we have an overarching concept - every human being is made in God's image and likeness. We must look for those things that make us more alike not those that highlight our differences. Therefore, we must open our eyes and see God's image and likeness in every human being, then the "We" and "Them" concept will fade like a misguided dream.

The November Food for Thought focused on Verna Myers, "How to Overcome our Biases? Walk boldly with them." TEDxBeaconStreet, recorded Nov 2014. Ms. Myer's TED talk called us to action. There are three things that she wanted to offer us to think about as ways to stop Ferguson from happening again; three things that she thought will help us reform our images of young black men; Can you imagine our country embracing young black men, seeing them as part of our future, giving them that kind of openness, that kind of grace we give to people we love?

(1) We got to get out of denial. Stop trying to be good people. We need real people because, real people have biases. She believes that we've gone about as far as we can go trying to make a difference trying to not see color. So in fact, what the scientists are telling us is to stare at awesome black people. Look at them directly in their faces and memorize them, because when we look at awesome folks who are black, it helps to dissociate the association that happens automatically in our brain.

(2) What I'm going to say is move toward young black men instead of away from them. It's not the hardest thing to do, but it's also one of these things where you have to be conscious and intentional about it.

(3) This is going to be harder, that is when we see something inappropriate, we have to have the courage to say something even to the people we love.

So in summary the underlining theme of the three Food for Thought material is to see person and notice the presence of God. The three Food for Thought materials provided various examples, ideas, and tools to help us look beyond our normal stereotypes, bias. The writers of the material urged us to refocus to see the humanity of every human being and to see God's likeness. So the title "I see you" is short for "I see God in you."