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Adventist Church or the community it serves? Do non-Anglo people have to become sanitized in order to “fit in” to the culture? Does everything other cultures experience have to be demonized, criticized, and ostracized? No one culture is better than the other—they are just different. There is “unity in diversity,” but there is no “unity in uniformity.”

Develop a philosophy for social justice: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8, NKJV).

The biblical case for social justice is described in Luke 6:31, Ecclesiastes 4:12, and Revelation 14:6. We are to treat people the way we would want to be treated, stand together when under attack, and preach the gospel to all who dwell on the earth.

Finally, the law of Christ is LOVE. Without love there is no “joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23, ESV). The church cannot bear the burdens of others without all the fruits of the Spirit which embody “love.”

No one has all the answers as to what the Church can do. People can be protesting in front of city hall, blocking traffic, laying down on the ground for eight minutes and 46 seconds to show solidarity, but

only God can change a heart. “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19, NIV). We can all receive new hearts. We can all learn to love more deeply as Christ commanded. We can allow Christ to forgive our sins and heal our land (2 Chronicles 7:14).



(LEFT) Church members leave signs at businesses that were damaged or looted; the signs say “You’ve been prayed for: Adventists for Black Lives Matter” (photo by Melanie Taimi).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sali Butler is the mother of twin daughters and grandmother of two. Her small family includes 10 African American males eight to 52 years old living in cities across the U.S. For every Black family who has lost a child to racial violence in America it is all too real “who will be next.”

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The STEWPOT

A POTPOURRI OF PRACTICAL IDEAS to help you become a better steward

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HEAR ME OUT

BY SALI BUTLER, MPH PM
 On behalf of Pacific Union Conference Regional Ministries

When I was asked what the Church can do in the aftermath of the George Floyd murder, during ongoing protests, and in future community engagement, it took some personal soul searching to respond. Our worldwide denomination should have a righteous response with amazing

(ABOVE) Young members from the Breath of Life Seventh-day Adventist church in Inglewood, Calif., walk through their community with shirts that say “Adventists for Black Lives Matter” (photo by Pono Lopez, pastor of the Long Beach Seventh-day Adventist Church).

STEWARDSHIP is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.

“Listen with the intention of changing the trajectory and not maintaining the status quo.”

impact for social change and for Kingdom building. However, charity begins at home, so we have to be an example that can be replicated for generations to come with the eradication of discrimination and racism within – no matter how covert it is. We must transform from multi-ethnic to multi-cultural to eliminate racism.

Confess: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, *KJV*).

Did you know Christians can live without confessing sins like racism, prejudice, discrimination, and injustice? If the early Church struggled with it, why would we pretend it doesn't exist in the 21st century? Whether it is our accepted individual or institutionalized practices, there is a need for confession and repentance. Tokenism, quotas, and pigeonholing are forms of discrimination toward race, culture, and gender – all in the comfort zone of denial.

Have conversations: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:9, *KJV*).

This text can be misconstrued that “white” is right. For example, in predominately Black, Latin, or other ethnic congregations, the style of worship is based on Anglo culture and preference. There is no biblical ground for it; it is just how missionaries incorporated their preferences into doctrinal standards. Let people be who God created as they authentically worship.

The gift of music and worship style for Black people is directly related to what kept our

ancestors strong enough to endure slavery, Jim Crow, apartheid, the civil rights movement, and the post-affirmative action era. God has delivered Black people over and over again. Taking away the culture of our worship is like saying, “What do you have to be so happy about?”

Listen with the intention of changing the trajectory and not maintaining the status quo. When slavery was abolished, the white South immediately developed a new system to continue its free labor enterprise – mass incarceration. Thousands of men, women, and children were charged with vagrancy without benefit of trial, jailed, chained together, and sent to back to the cotton fields to pay for the crime of being free.*

We need to talk about racial issues. We need to listen to one another without taking offense, demanding compliance, or minimizing experiences. If someone shares their story about racial profiling, just



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(ABOVE) Adventist church members from Southern California churches silently hold names of victims and (FAR LEFT and RIGHT) share inspirational messages (photos by Pono Lopez, pastor of the Long Beach Seventh-day Adventist Church).



listen. It is not our experience; we cannot understand, but we can empathize. It is not the time to advocate for the perpetrator.

Four decades of American presidents used the “War on Crime” to win elections and further the demonization of Black men and women in America. Families have been destroyed, and lives have been lost. More than 85 percent of Black people who have been sentenced never had a trial. Instead, they were coerced into taking a plea bargain – admitting to a crime under the threat of receiving a maximum sentence if found guilty in court and deprived of the Sixth Amendment right to trial by jury. These facts, while not well known, are well documented. Conversation, dialogue, and dissemination of information need to happen to better understand the need for change in our justice system. Have conversations, conversations, conversations, and more conversations – until you can look someone in the eye and say, “I see you. I hear you. I understand you have been hurt.”

Pray for spiritual guidance and engagement: “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2, *KJV*).

Keeping a distance from people of a different race or culture is self-protective and disables us from bearing anyone's burdens except our own. The “I'll be praying for you” statement is the fallback line we use to say “we care.” If we stop what we are doing, look the other person in the eye, reach for both their hands, and say, “Let's pray,” this gesture implies we sense your pain; we want to help.

Share what you learn: “He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately” (Acts 18:26, *NIV*).

All churches can host round table talks or town hall meetings with open dialogue regarding race relations. Invite local officials, social workers, law enforcement, medical staff, and other experts to participate in panel discussions about disparities with an intentional focus on what can be done to bring about social change. We can learn something if we are open-minded.

Cultural diversity training empowers people toward empathy rather than tolerance. Are ethnicity and culture truly accepted in the

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