



This article by Bishop Harry Jackson is included in *Praying With Jesus*, coming in 2016.

The Reconciled Church: Seven Bridges of Peace

Join Jesus in Prayer:

Jesus, reset my prayer life. I want to see breakdowns of racial, social and status barriers in our communities and especially in the household of faith.

PREFACE:

In praying for future believers, Jesus relayed this in John 17:20-23, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" Given the ongoing state of obvious racial mistrust in America, the unification of the church—is a must to help bring about criminal justice reform and reconciliation. It certainly won't be easy, but unification has to be about more than simple change. Lasting change is required. And last change requires transformation. It's not just about getting along; it's about getting it right. Only great diversity, in unison, can bring us to our better selves.

The atmosphere in our culture has reached a critical, if not powder-keg stage. Violent protests have become symbolic of the racial divide in America and clear, unabashed examples of the need for racial reconciliation and criminal justice reform.

It is the church—God's people—that must spearhead the movement and lead the way in racial reconciliation, societal reform and changes in the current criminal justice system. It is only through a unified church and adherence to Jesus' prayer in John 17, that we will heal the racial divide in this country and prompt justice system officials to bring about the much-needed change in the way they handle volatile situations.

The greatest source of influence over this nation should be the church, not some political party. We've tried to make another pharaoh our source of provision and hope. We've been kept in bondage by a system we have erroneously put our trust in. We need to get an answer to Jesus' prayer, and immediately. The question of the hour is whether the church will meet Jesus' prayer to the Father. Father, God is looking at us right now. He sees His family; He sees His kids. And God wants to see a family that loves their Father so much that they love each other.

LEARN TO ENCOUNTER JESUS

Take the next few moments to reflect on Christ's final moments with His disciples. Revisit the emotions that must have filled the Upper Room. Jesus knows He is only hours from the cross. His time with the disciples is short. He tenderly washes the disciples' feet in an ultimate gesture of humility and service. He reassures them of the Kingdom that awaits them. He reassures them of the Comforter who will come. And then out of this heart of love, Jesus makes a bold declaration. The human part of Jesus is about to die a horrible death, so the words He says must be important. His words are also important because Christ gives a command, and only God gives commandments! "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" (John 13:34).

Christ gives this same command now. The One who humbly sacrificed Himself for you, died a horrible death for you gives a command. Jesus reassures you of the Kingdom that awaits and the Holy Spirit that's ever-present. The God-man Himself—has given a command. Love others like He loves us.

Talk to Jesus. Tell Him about your willingness to love others, just as He has loved you. Without regard for race or status, tell Jesus that you are willing to yield to His command.

Jesus, I know that You loved me with extravagant love. I am willing to obey your command and share this love with others, so that the world will know You.

As the church employs *Seven Bridges of Peace*, we can bring about society-changing transformation within our communities. These seven bridges are described below. For our communities to experience transformation:

1. We need gatherings of Christian, interdenominational and multi-ethnic believers to lift up specific prayer points.

In order for reconciliation to occur, prayer must be perpetually offered to God requesting wisdom and divine aid for the multi-generational fulfillment of the Great Commandment (John 17:1-26; love and unity) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18-20). We also need periodic voluntary engagement in transparent, honest, frank, civil and Godly dialogue; the implementation of plans of action to confront, overcome and resolve destructive views, values, convictions, preferences and practices (like racism, sexism, age-ism, etc.) that divide the Lord's Church, misrepresent Jesus Christ, defame God's creation and hinder the fulfillment of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

2. We need the churches' involvement in order to foster academic skills in the lives of our young people.

God's people must work together to increase access to early educational programs prior to kindergarten for children. Churches can play a major role in offering academic and character building enrichment programs to students in middle and high school.

3. We need to address citizen and law enforcement rights and issues while engaging in civic responsibilities.

The church can play a vital role in helping to emphasize and educate in Christian citizenship training. Wise community leaders will review best practices for dealing with citizen and law enforcement rights and issues that threaten to denigrate, deteriorate, debilitate or devastate the highest quality of life for urban residents.

4. We need strategic efforts identified in order to serve under-resourced residents in financially depressed zones of our urban community.

Compassionate outreach efforts are needed to serve the poverty stricken residents living in economically devastated areas of our communities. Models must include services such as counsel and representation for legal issues, financial assistance, housing education, health-care programs, and employment training.

PRAY

"I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me" (Matthew 25:45).

Read the passage above carefully. Allow Christ's words to penetrate your heart. When we refuse to help the "least of these" in our communities, it's as if we are refusing to help our Savior. Pause for a moment and ask the Lord to reveal any times when perhaps you have seen the needs of the poor, the less educated, people of a different economic status or race—and yet not been willing to help. Ask His Spirit to show you any needed areas of growth.

Jesus, show me any times that I passed by the needs of others and was unwilling to help. I know that I hurt You at those times and my heart is grieved. Change me.

5. We must nurture the divine sanctity of life, identity, purpose and destiny through programs for marriages and families.

The church can help facilitate transformation by providing services that will help to introduce,

rebuild, restore and/or enhance the divine sanctity of life, the discovery of personal and relational identity, and the relevance of healthy marriages and families. Church leaders can help citizens navigate the discovery and the fulfillment of this vision through seminars, personal and group counseling, youth athletic programs, pro-life services and biblical marriage and family training. Mentoring and fatherhood initiatives will be a key component of family development.

6. We need strategic involvement with the criminal justice system and a plan for reform.

The need for minority engagement with the criminal justice system is at the core of our current tensions. Transformation would include training for prison and jail evangelism workers, and regional partnerships for prison aftercare and job creation. Evangelism and outreach to the incarcerated is a strategic opportunity to bring transformation and reconciliation. The church is needed to bring freedom to those behind bars by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This aspect of service is specific way that the Church can reach out to love the least, last and the lost.

7. We need to equip churches in how to encourage ethical capitalism.

In addition to personal financial training, credit repair, and benevolence, many other dimensions of economic equipping can be launched within churches. Investment training, schools of business, and specific entrepreneurial training plans can be developed, providing hope to even the poorest communities.

As the church models unity—as God's people address the racial divide in our own house—new things can happen. We will see more clearly that we have not just a race problem, but a class problem, a poverty problem and a spiritual problem. Church, government, business—together we stand—together we can revitalize education, economic development and justice—or divided we fall.

SHARE

Plan a conversation with another person. Tell them how Jesus has reset your priorities. Tell them how Jesus has loved you and now you are committed to loving others—regardless of race or status.

LOVE

Think carefully about how you might give to “the least of these” in your community. And remember, as you give, you are giving to Jesus! Make an intentional plan for how you will demonstrate Christ's love to those who are poor, of a different economic or educational status.

I am committed to helping Jesus... and the least of these by...

Bishop Harry Jackson: In response to police-shootings and race divisions in the past year—North Charleston, the most recent—The Reconciled Church (TRC) is multi-racial, non-denominational and apolitical Christian action. It is a wide network of leaders sharing best practices and clearing paths to change—local and national. This past January in the TRC's formative meeting, select leaders met in Dallas and outlined *Seven Bridges to Peace*, seven categories in which to spur churches, legislators, and the private sector to necessary change. With every TRC meeting, numbers grow, networks expand and we add specific actions that make sense, remake people, and serve a nation.

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