

The Gift of 'Ah-Ha'

by Marc Wyatt, CBF Field Personnel

I had the privilege of participating in a Racial Equity Institute (REI) workshop last May thanks to CBF of North Carolina. From the start, the facilitators had my full attention. Simply stated, the 16-hour workshop helped me to develop a new understanding of how racism has been constructed and systemized in America.



REI
racialequityinstitute, llc

Early in the seminar we took turns going around the room introducing ourselves and stating what we hoped would be the outcome of our learning. I said, "My name is Marc and I don't want to be a racist anymore." During one of the breaks a young black man approached me and thanked me for being honest and vulnerable. He told me his name was Nick. Later we shared lunch and our stories.

At the end of the REI we went around the room again. Only this time, we shared how we were doing and what we planned to do with what we had learned. I was deeply affected by the words of each of the black professionals. Each in turn shared a similar "ah-ha" experience. They shared how they had felt the weight of racial inequity always upon their shoulders. The REI had given them a gift. They were all too familiar with their personal experiences but now they had been given affirmation; they weren't imagining things. They were living in a racially inequitable America.

I was transformed as I realized that there wasn't just one America. There are two Americas - maybe even a dozen. There is the America I grew up in. And there is the America minorities inhabit. And the two aren't the same.

When I returned home and tried to explain this to my wife, I found myself emotionally moved. I began to consider my black neighbors across the street and down the block. I don't really know them. We are friendly, but seem satisfied simply to pass greetings and smiles to each other as we come and go. The next day my neighbor was cutting the grass. I went over and stopped him. I apologized for not being a better neighbor. I told him that I wanted to introduce him and his wife to my wife, Kim. We had a great conversation. Turns out his name is Marc. Go figure?!

REI gave me a sacred gift. You may get yours by attending the next Racial Equity Institute near you.

THE CBFNC RACIAL RECONCILIATION TEAM is committed to helping our churches understand racism in its institutional and structural forms so that we all can be better equipped to work for change. It is partnering with The Racial Equity Institute which is committed to bringing participants into an awareness and analysis of the historical and cultural roots of institutional racism and how the disparities of racism continue today in our systems. It does not focus on individual bias but embraces a movement approach. It believes that "systemic interventions and training can work to change thinking, reduce disparities, and improve outcomes for all populations."

REI's Phase I workshop is a full two days, led by two or three trainers with 40 participants. Through presentations, discussion, video, and interactive exercises, attendees are taken on a journey of inherent racism in our country from the 1600's to today. If you are interested in attending an REI workshop, contact Linda Jones at ljones@cbfnc.org.

Unidiversity is a week-long Christian summer experience for youth.

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