

29 October 2017 Lawrence Monroe Hazard First Presbyterian
 What I learned at the 2017 annual meeting of the KCC

I learned that the council is all about the coming together of a diverse people to the common ground of the **Cross** in a united voice for the common good, to fight against injustice, to free the oppressed, and feed the hungry; on the theme of deconstructing power and privilege.

The Rev. Dr. Meguel De La Torre gave an impassioned speech on how to liberate the oppressed by deconstructing the white privileged world view. He said the word “hope” in Spanish means “to wait for” and often for people of color, the end of waiting is not good. All too often the white, privileged world view of history has whitewashed the dark world of the oppressed and enslaved. The chaos of history does not offer much hope as the oppressed cannot get past the pain and death of Saturday to get to Sunday’s resurrection.

Rev. De La Torre asked us if we struggle for justice because we think we can win, or because we have no choice? He said “the struggle defines my faith; it is who I am.” The Puritans brought with them a whitewashed view of the Bible which persists to this day. Many people of color have always seen the real Jesus/Satan as “tricksters”, an ethic of deceit in order to spark change for the good/bad. The virtue ethics of the privileged has brushed aside the survival ethics of the oppressed.

His challenge to the group: Embrace hopelessness as not despair, the state of the world today, but in the sense that because the hopeless have nothing to lose, change for the better is possible.

I attended an eye opening workshop by Dr. Emily Askew on the topic of “Immigration Privilege”. She got us engaged by asking each of us to tell the group where their mother’s grandmother came from; that our story, not our station in life, is what is important. She asked what does it mean to be a “sanctuary congregation”? What do we as documented citizens take for granted? The undocumented fear that when they see their children off to school that they may not see them again; that ICE may arrest them if they seek shelter after a hurricane; that the abused won’t go to court for fear of arrest by ICE. People of color are viewed negatively for more often than white or Asian. Only 3% of undocumented are criminals. Most are guilty of the “crime” of crossing the border, having a fake SS card so they could work, or driving without a license.

Her challenge: reciting facts and figures won’t change people; stories will.

The second workshop I attended was “A House Divided” which gave a glimpse on next year’s theme. Two “RUXers”, members of the Kentucky Urban Rural Exchange, explained how they try to bridge divides by the “art of the rural”, a process called “creative place making”, helping people have meaningful experiences so that they can grow in understanding and love. This involves listening to other’s experiences, respecting their space, and reflecting on what action to take in love; listening to understand and be able to unpack the power and privilege that may have been a stumbling block.

Participants were asked: what issues are dividing your community? What resources does your community have? What are needed? What do you want your community to look like in two generations?

The sermon by Rev. Traci Blackmon during Thursday’s assembly worship, called “We Are Living In A Breach”, was a powerful call to action. Based on Isaiah 59, she called the listeners to “embrace the theology of resistance; to reject the theology of favoritism (chosen ness)”. We are called to repair divisions with the tools God has already provided; to empower the needy and oppressed. She said we need to “put skin in the game”.