

# **HOLY CONVERSATIONS: A Curriculum for Predominantly White Congregations**



## **SESSION READINGS in preparation for ON-GOING CONVERSATIONS**

*(To be distributed at the end of Session Eight)*

Curriculum Designer:

---

Rev. Thomas Hoffmann  
PO Box 691254, Tulsa, OK 74169-1254  
thomas@holyconversations.church  
918.346.9972

**Holy Conversations about Race:  
A Curriculum for Predominantly White Congregations**

**Reading #1 to help with on-going Holy Conversations  
“Holy Conversation” as “Uncomfortable Conversation”**

(As most first readings, this one focuses on improving our ability to have Holy Conversations)



*Zachary R. Wood is a columnist and assistant opinion editor at The Guardian, a Robert L. Bartley Fellow at The Wall Street Journal, and a class of 2018 graduate of Williams College. His recent work has appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, The Huffington Post, The Nation, The Weekly Standard, Times Higher Education, and Inside Higher Ed. A Washington, DC, native, Wood currently resides in New York City. He is the author of *Uncensored: My Life and Uncomfortable Conversations at the Intersection of Black and White America*, published by Penguin/Random House. This Reading is taken from a TED Talk given in April, 2018, in Vancouver, British Columbia. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LY5hMMjiN6k>*

---

In 1994, Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein co-authored “The Bell Curve,” an extremely controversial book which claims that, on average, some races are smarter and more likely to succeed than others. Murray and Herrnstein also suggest that a lack of critical intelligence explains the prominence of violent crime in poor African-American communities Curriculum.

But Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein are not the only people who think this. In 2012, a writer, journalist, and political commentator named John Derbyshire wrote an article that was supposed to be a non-Black version of the talk that many Black parents feel they have to give their kids today: advice on how to stay safe. In his article, Derbyshire offers suggestions such as, “Do not attend events likely to draw a lot of Blacks,” “Stay out of heavily Black neighborhoods,” and “Do not act the ‘Good Samaritan’ to Blacks in distress.”

And yet, in 2016 I invited John Derbyshire as well as Charles Murray to speak in my school knowing full well that I would be giving him a platform and attention for ideas that I despised and rejected.

But this is just a further evolution of a journey of “uncomfortable learning” throughout my life. When I was 10 years old, my mother was diagnosed with schizophrenia, a mental illness characterized by mood swings and paranoid delusions. Throughout my life, my mother's rage would turn our small house into a minefield. Yet, though I feared her rage on a daily basis, I also learned so much from her. Our relationship was complicated and challenging, and at the age of 14 it was decided that I needed to live apart from her. But over the years I've come to appreciate some of the important lessons my mother taught me about life.

She was the first person who spoke to me about learning from “the other side.” She, like me, was born and raised in a family of committed liberal Democrats, yet she encouraged me to see the world, and the issues our world faces, as complex, controversial, and ever-changing.

One day I came across the phrase “affirmative action” in a book I was reading and when I asked her what the term meant she spent what felt like an hour giving me a thorough and thoughtful explanation that would make sense to a small child. She even made the topic sound at least as interesting as any of my professors have. She explained the many reasons why people of various political views both challenge and support affirmative action, stressing that while she strongly supported it herself, it was important for me to view the issue as a controversial one, with a long history, a questionable future, and a host of complicating factors. While affirmative action can increase the presence of minorities at elite educational institutions, she felt that it could also disadvantage hardworking people of different races from more affluent backgrounds. My mom wanted me to understand that I should never just write off opinions that I disagreed with or disliked, because there was always something to learn from the perspective of others, even when doing so might be difficult.

But life at home with my mom was not the only aspect of my journey that has been formative and uncomfortable. In fourth grade, she decided that I should attend a private school in order to receive the best education possible. As a Black student attending predominantly White private schools, I've encountered attitudes and behaviors that reflected racial stereotypes. Several of my friends' parents assumed within minutes of meeting me that my best skill was playing basketball, and it really upset me to think that my race made it harder for them to see me as a student who loved reading, writing, and speaking.

Experiences like this motivated me to work tirelessly to disprove what I knew people had assumed. My mother even said that in order to put my best foot forward, I had to be patient, alert, and excruciatingly well-mannered. To prove that I belonged, I had to show poise and confidence, the ability to speak well, and listen closely. Only then would my peers see that I deserve to be there as much as they did.

Despite this racial stereotyping, and the discomfort I often felt, the learning I gained from other aspects of being at an elite private school were incredibly valuable. I was encouraged by my teachers to explore my curiosity, to challenge myself in new ways, and to deepen my understanding of subjects that fascinated me the most.

Going to college was the next step. I was excited to take my intellectual drive and interest in the world of ideas to the next level. I was eager to engage in lively debate with peers and professors and with outside speakers; to listen, to learn, and to gain a deeper understanding of myself and of others. While I was fortunate to meet peers and professors who were interested in doing the same thing, my desire to engage with difficult ideas was also met with resistance.

To prepare myself to engage with controversy in the real world, I joined a group that brought controversial speakers to campus. However, many people fiercely opposed this group, and I received significant pushback from students, faculty, and my administration. For many, it was difficult to see how bringing controversial speakers to campus could be valuable when they caused harm. And it was disappointing to me facing personal attacks, having my administration cancel speakers, and hearing my intentions distorted by those around me. My work also hurt the feelings of many and I understood that. Of course, no one likes being offended, and I certainly don't like hearing controversial speakers argue that feminism has become a war against men or that Blacks have lower IQs than Whites. I also understand that some people have experienced traumatic experiences in their

lives and, for some, listening to offensive views can be like reliving the very traumas that they've worked so hard to overcome. Many argue that by giving these people a platform, you're doing more harm than good, and I am reminded of this every time I listen to these points of view and feel my stomach turn.

Yet, tuning out opposing viewpoints doesn't make them go away, because millions of people agree with them. In order to understand the potential of society to progress forward, we need to understand the counter-forces. By engaging with controversial and offensive ideas, I believe that we can find common ground--if not with the speakers themselves, then with the audiences they may attract or indoctrinate. Through engaging, I believe that we may reach a better understanding--a deeper understanding--of our own beliefs and preserve the ability to solve problems which we can't do if we don't talk to each other and make an effort to be good listeners.

But soon after I announced that John Derbyshire would be speaking on campus, student backlash erupted on social media. The tide of resistance, in fact, was so intense that my college president rescinded the invitation. I was deeply disappointed by this, because, as I saw that it, there would be nothing that any of my peers or I could do to silence someone who agreed with him. I look out at what's happening on college campuses and I see the anger. And I get it. But what I wish I could tell people is this: it's worth the discomfort, it's worth listening, and that we're stronger, not weaker, because of it.

When I think about my experiences with “uncomfortable learning” and I reflect upon them, I found that it's been very difficult to change the values of the intellectual community that I've been a part of. But I do feel a sense of hope when I think about the individual interactions that I've been able to have with students who both support the work that I'm doing and who feel challenged by it and those who do not support it. What I found is that while it can be difficult to change the values of a community, we can gain a lot from individual interactions. While I didn't get to engage with John Derbyshire due to my president's dis-invitation. I was able to have dinner with Charles Murray before his talk. I knew the conversation would be difficult and I didn't expect it to be pleasant. But it was cordial, and I did gain a deeper understanding of his arguments. I found that he, like me, believed in creating a more just society. The thing is, his understanding of what justice entailed was very different from my own. The way in which he wanted to understand the issue, the way in which he wanted to approach the issue of inequality, was also different from my own. And I found that his understanding of issues like welfare and affirmative action was tied and deeply rooted in his understanding of various libertarian and conservative beliefs, and what diminishes and increases their presence in our society.

While he expressed his viewpoints eloquently, I remained thoroughly unconvinced, but I did walk away with a deeper understanding. It's my belief that to achieve progress in the face of adversity, we need a genuine commitment to gaining a deeper understanding of humanity. I'd like to see a world with more leaders who are familiar with the depths of the views of those they deeply disagree with, so that they can understand the nuances of everyone they're representing. I see this as an ongoing process involving constant learning. And I'm confident that I'll be able to add value down the line if I continue building empathy and understanding through engaging with unfamiliar perspectives.

**Reading #2 to help with on-going Holy Conversations**  
**“Holy Conversation” as “No More Us vs. Them”**  
**Acts 11:1-18**

(As with most second Readings, this one offers a Bible study reflection)

Excerpted & adapted from “Commentary on Acts 11:1-18” by Mitzi J. Smith, *The Working Preacher* website, April 24, 2016. [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2828](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2828)



*Dr. Smith is a teacher, preacher, biblical scholar, author, and founder/President of Living in Full Empowerment. She grew up in Columbus, Ohio with her three siblings. Smith earned a BA in Theology from Columbia Union College in Takoma Park, Maryland; a MA in Black Studies from The Ohio State University; an MDiv from Howard University School of Divinity; and a Ph.D. in Religion (New Testament and Early Christian Studies) from Harvard University in 2006. She is the first African American female to earn the Ph.D. in New Testament from Harvard.*

---

The Jewish leaders in Judea, the circumcised, criticized Peter for sharing a meal with the uncircumcised, the Gentiles (cf. Galatians 2:11-14).

Peter proceeds to tell how it happened that he engaged in table sharing with Gentiles, the uncircumcised. God sent Peter a vision of a carnal feast consisting of bottom feeders or scavengers. It was a nightmare for an orthodox Jewish man. According to the Levitical food prohibitions in the Torah, Jews were not to indulge in (or with) certain flesh (Leviticus 11). Based on the question that the circumcised asked Peter, it seems that he may have been using the dream both to explain the baptism of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and by extension to justify his table sharing with them. Does baptism erase those distinctions? In the dream God annuls those distinctions prior to baptism. Even though it was the Lord who told Peter in the vision to eat the food before him, Peter responded that he absolutely could not. Such cuisine had been prohibited. But the Lord trumps tradition and Torah instruction based on God’s original creative authority and act: you cannot make profane or unclean what God has created clean.

This horror flick played out three times in Peter’s dream (Acts 11:10), after which three men from Caesarea showed up at Peter’s door, requesting his presence and prepared to escort him to Cornelius home (11:11; cf. 10:3-8). Peter interprets God’s disruption of his sleep and his biased thinking as the Spirit teaching him not to make distinctions “between us and them” (11:12). Even as God corrects our faulty theological anthropology, it takes time to undue years of putting tradition above God and of bias behaviors, stereotypes, and rhetoric. An “us and them” mentality should haunt our human sensibilities if we would experience and benefit from our common humanity. We need to allow our biases and stereotypes to be checked. It is imperative that we engage with others different from ourselves, in more than superficial ways. And most of the time it will not happen when “us” keeps our distance from “them.” This construction of others who are different from us as “unclean” based on those differences signifies a belief in our superiority. If we get too close, live too close, interact too much, we risk contamination and becoming unclean too. Sometimes our self-definition is constructed upon differentiating ourselves from others, instead of upon who we are in God. We can talk about bearing crosses, but we actually seek ways to avoid risks that disrupt the boundaries and

biases that safeguard our group privilege. In fact, many think the only people who should live with risk (of violence, homelessness, and hunger) are minorities and poor people. Somehow, we have convinced ourselves that those people, “them,” are unclean anyway; that they are accustomed to risk, to death, to the absence of salvation or wholeness.

Significantly, Peter does not mention Cornelius by name in his apologetic response to the interrogation from the Judean circumcised brothers. He refers to Cornelius as “the man,” (Acts 11:12) and he references him using third (he/his) and second person (you) singular pronouns. Perhaps, this is evidence of how difficult it is to see others as fully human, fully clean after years of seeing and treating them as other than clean and human. Many white brothers and sisters and some people of color deny that they ever perceive or treat people who are racially or economically different from themselves with bias. This is despite being entrenched in racialized, class-conscious institutions and traditions that presume people of color, women and others to be inferior. But the only way we begin to put an end to making distinctions between “them” and “us” is to learn to recognize and admit our biases and their impact on human relationships. Racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other biased behaviors and thinking are not godly; they are motivated by fear of the other and not by love of humanity. “God shows no favoritism” for one human being other another.

Before Peter showed up at Cornelius’s house, God had first talked with Cornelius in a vision (Acts 10:1-7). Peter preached good news at Cornelius’s house, but it was not the first good news Cornelius had received from God. The preached word is filtered through fallible human beings like Peter, Paul, and Mary. But God does not always limit God’s self to a third-party witness. God has one-on-one encounters with human beings regardless of their religious affiliations and creeds (the Romans were religious people; as a Roman, Cornelius likely feared the God of Israel but also the gods of Rome, Acts 10:1-2). God does not create religion; humans do. God created the world and all living and life-giving things in it. God will disrupt and interrupt the boundaries humans construct.

Before Peter baptized them, God poured out God’s spirit upon the Gentiles. God’s spirit will work despite, through, or prior to our ritual constructions. This is comforting knowing how often we get things wrong and how often we persist in making distinctions between “us” and “them” based on race, language, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, our fears, and other differences, real and constructed. “The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us,” 11:12.

The Spirit counseled Peter to accept what had already been true about God: God does not show favoritism.

---

## Reading #3 to help with on-going Holy Conversations “Holy Conversation” as “Being With” (Becoming an Ally with People of Color)

Excerpted & adapted from a handout from the YWCA entitled, “Becoming an Ally” and  
“For Our Friends Desiring to be Allies,” *Sojourners Magazine*, by Courtney Ariel, 08/16/2017;  
<https://sojo.net/articles/our-white-friends-desiring-be-allies>

**What Is An “Ally?”** An ally is an individual from outside a marginalized community who speaks out to take a stand against social injustice and respectfully steps up to help when appropriate. An ally works to be an agent of social change rather than passively supporting the injustice by remaining silent.

**What are the Characteristics of an Effective Ally?** An effective ally . . .

- ++ Takes responsibility for learning about one’s own White heritage, culture, and experience. Feels good about one’s own ethnicity and race, and is comfortable and proud of one’s own identity
- ++ Takes responsibility for learning about the heritage, culture and experience of those they are allied with, and how oppression works in their everyday life
- ++ Listens to and respects the perspectives and experiences of those they are allied with.
- ++ Acknowledges one’s privileges received as a White person, and works to eliminate or change privileges into rights that those they are allied with also enjoy

“If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us walk together.”

--Lila Watson, *Australian Aboriginal woman, in response to mission workers*

- ++ Recognizes that unlearning racially-biased beliefs and actions is a lifelong process, not a single event, and welcomes each learning opportunity; is willing to make mistakes and learn from them
- ++ Is willing to take risks, try new behaviors, and act. in spite of one’s own fear and even resistance from others
- ++ Takes care of one’s self to avoid bum-out
- ++ Acts against social injustice out of a belief that it is in their own self-interest to do so
- ++ Is committed to taking action against social injustice in those spheres where one has influence; believes they can make a difference by acting and speaking out against social injustice
- ++ Knows how to cultivate support from others in order to create additional allies

**In addition to the above**, here are six more things you can do to be a stronger ally:

**1. Listen more; talk less.** You don't have to have something to say all of the time. You have also had the microphone for most of the time, for a very long time, and it will be good to give the microphone to someone else who is living a different experience than your own.

**2.** For one out of every three opinions/insights shared by a person of color in your life, **try to resist the need to respond with a better or different insight** about something that you read or listened to as it relates to their shared opinion. It can sometimes (not always) feel like “whitesplaining” — meaning to explain or comment on something in an over-confident or condescending way. This adds to the silencing of the voices of people of color. Try just to listen and sit with someone else's experience.

**3.** Being an ally is different than simply wanting not be racist (thank you for that, by the way). Being an ally requires you to **educate yourself about systemic racism in this country**. Read Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* and Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* and so many other great books and articles. Use your voice and influence to direct the folks that walk alongside you toward the voice of someone that is living a marginalized experience.

**4. Please try not to say “I can't believe that something like this would happen in this day and age!” when atrocities like the events in Charleston, S.C., and Charlottesville, Va., happen.** People of color have been aware of this kind of hatred and violence in America for centuries. Your shock and outrage just echo the fact that you have lived an entire life with the luxury of indifference.

**5. Ask when you don't know — but do the work first.** Now, some persons of color will tell you not to ask them anything; don't be offended by that. Folks are tired, because it is exhausting to be a marginalized person in this world. However, there is something special that happens within human connections and relationships. Ask questions within relationships that feel safe and do so respectfully. But, to the best of your ability, do the hard work of educating yourself first before placing this burden on others.

**6.** And finally, know that **you're going to make mistakes — expect this. But keep showing up.** I believe that this is holy work, this work of justice and the pursuit of it. It doesn't need an audience, and it will not always have one. It will happen most days in ways that are unseen. It might mean providing a meal or shelter, listening, using your particular area of expertise to help someone in need of that expertise who might not have access to it otherwise, bailing a protester out of jail, or paying a family's rent one month (if you have the resources to do so), or marching at a rally with marginalized folks alongside other allies. There may not always be a practical, tangible way to pursue this work, but I believe you will know it when you meet it face-to-face.

However it looks, it will be something that you do without needing to be thanked or receive praise — you are not a savior. Marginalized/disenfranchised folks can and will survive without you — we are magic. However, I urge you to pursue this work, knowing that a system of white privilege afforded you access to opportunities while denying them to so many others. Being an ally is one way to rectify this.

**So, above all, I urge you keep trying.** You're going to make mistakes; expect this. But keep showing up. Be compassionate. Lead with empathy, always. Keep learning and growing. If you do this, I truly believe you'll be doing the work of an ally.

## Reading #4 to help with on-going Holy Conversations “Holy Conversation” as “Knowing Myself”

Excerpted & adapted from Working Paper 189, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondence through Work in Women’s Studies” (1988), by Peggy McIntosh, taken from the Winter 1990 issue of *Independent School*



---

*Peggy McIntosh is an American feminist, anti-racism activist, scholar, speaker, and Senior Research Associate of the Wellesley Centers for Women. She is the founder of the National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum.*

---

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and time of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live, and where neighbors would approve of my household.
4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors there will be neutral or pleasant to me.
5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
9. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.
10. I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's voice in a group in which they are the only member of their race.

11. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
12. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
13. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
14. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
15. I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes toward their race.
16. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.
17. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race.
18. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
19. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
20. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
21. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider,
22. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge", I will be facing a person of my race.
23. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
24. I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
25. If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.
26. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.
27. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.
28. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.
29. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
30. If my day, week or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it had racial overtones.

31. I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to mentor me.
32. I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.
33. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.
34. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
35. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
36. I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.
37. If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that my race is not the problem.
38. I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.
39. I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race.
40. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.
41. I can travel alone or with my spouse without expecting embarrassment or hostility in those who deal with us.
42. My children are given texts and classes which implicitly support our kind of family unit and do not turn them against my choice of domestic partnership.
43. I will feel welcomed and "normal" in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

## Reading #5 to help with on-going Holy Conversations “Holy Conversation” as “Sunday Speech”

Excerpted and adapted from “An Unholy Silence in White Churches,” by Jennifer Harvey, *Sojourner Magazine*, 09/22/2017. Found online at <https://sojo.net/articles/unholy-silence-white-churches>



*Dr. Jennifer Harvey is Professor of Religion at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. She received her Ph.D. in Christian Social Ethics from Union Theological Seminary. She teaches on religion and ethics with race, gender, activism, politics, spirituality, justice, and any other aspect of social life in which religiosity decides to "show up."*

---

I have extended family in Mississippi. I didn't know this part of the family well growing up. But once I made the connection as a child between the civil rights movement and the fact that Mississippi — a place my grandma once took me to visit — was *in the South* I became fascinated with them.

So I was surprised when my mother told me recently that during the civil rights movement one of the beloved patriarchs in this Southern wing of the family had introduced a motion calling on his congregation to de-segregate. My childhood fascination returned.

Why had I never heard this before? How did he do it? Given his status as a respected pillar, was it a dramatic moral reckoning as his community saw the light? Then what happened?

The answers that came felt as vague as those I got in my youngster years. Nothing really happened. The motion failed. And, then my family stayed.

It's the staying that leaves me most unsettled. My family stayed there in a church that had explicitly said white supremacy was consistent with the gospel. They raised children and some of their grandchildren there. They prayed, took communion, and broke bread with other whites there. They listened to Protestant-length sermons there — sermons ostensibly interpreting and proclaiming the word of God — week in and week out.

I don't share this story to call out this part of my family — folks I still don't know very well. I'm not pointing at them as if they were unique and different. They weren't. In fact, that's the point. Their response was pretty typical of white Christians then and I share it because it's remains typical today.

Racist vitriol and violence against communities of color and religious minorities continue to intensify. Self-avowed white supremacists and neo-Nazis have marched and terrorized a city, viciously beating protestors — even killing one. There are other incidences happening all over the country. With each passing week we're becoming saturated.

But with each passing week open questions remain in many predominantly white congregations. Will my pastor speak explicitly about white supremacist hatred this week? Will my congregation formally denounce white nationalism with clarity and visibility? If we do speak about it, will it only be in carefully worded prayers about love right before our weekly ritual of passing the peace? Or,

will there be silence altogether?

And, here's the real question many white Christians face right now: What are we willing to live with in order to stay?

My Southern relatives were *actually* opposed to white supremacy. They just couldn't do that much about it.

It's easy to look back today on what white Christians did in the 1950s and 1960s and see those days as full of clarion clear crossroads. Surely, if I had lived then, my church's failure to clear such a low moral hurdle — rejecting segregated church — would have been a crossroads for me. Surely, I would have made a scene like Jesus in the Temple, and left.

But, what happened in your church the Sunday after Charlottesville? What happened the week after DACA was rescinded? Was the gospel spoken? Or was there silence?

Maybe our congregations and pastors are silent or talk about Charlottesville and DACA only in carefully worded prayers because we have an ill-conceived notion that somehow these are political or partisan matters. Such matters are always difficult to navigate in church.

But make no mistake. None of this is about politics or partisanship.

We are in a battle over whose lives matter and whose lives do not in this country. We are embroiled in a soul struggle over who is part of our community and who is considered disposable. This is about whether we actually believe in human rights and dignity in the face of civic hatred, hostility and violence against black people and Latinx people (and Muslims, Jews, LGBT people and women of many different races, religions, and orientations).

It's about all of us being all hands-on deck in a struggle for our lives and for our future as a nation. If white Christians aren't *there*, where are we?

Last week in Creston, Iowa (less than 100 miles from where I live) five high school students posed in hoods, beside a burning cross and a Confederate flag (one holding a weapon). My friend, and fellow Iowa clergyperson, Anna Blaedel wrote: "hey iowans: if your church talks about the Iowa State [football] game tomorrow but doesn't talk about what happened in Creston, your church is siding with white supremacy."

Blaedel's right. What's being said or not in our churches this week (and next) is the precise moral measure of what we are actually preaching in our churches.

A church that is silent today and in the coming weeks and months is a church beholden to white supremacy. A church silent today is a church increasingly tolerating the grip of a white Christian nationalism that is, indeed, taking up more and more bandwidth in our bodies, souls and minds.

Silence is speech. Silence is the taking of a side. And silence in a so-called sacred space in these times is the opposite of holy.