

AN APPROACH TO TRANSITIONING A PREDOMINANTLY  
WHITE CONGREGATION TO EMBRACE A MULTIRACIAL  
MULTICULTURAL WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

A Professional Project Paper Submitted to the  
Drew Theological School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Ministry

Advisor: The Rev. Dr. J. Terry Todd, PhD

Arturo Pierre Lewis  
Drew University  
Madison, New Jersey  
August 2021

© 2021 Arturo Pierre Lewis

All Rights Reserved.

ABSTRACT

AN APPROACH TO TRANSITIONING A PREDOMINANTLY  
WHITE CONGREGATION TO EMBRACE A MULTIRACIAL  
MULTICULTURAL WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

Arturo Pierre Lewis

Emmanuel Church, Ridgewood, New Jersey

This work is about the learning of a diverse and inclusive multiracial multicultural worship service and how I believe it can transform a traditional white congregation. I describe how a multiracial multicultural worship service can revive a congregation and interest newcomers.

The two multiracial multicultural worship services that I present here are comprised of diverse and inclusive congregants who gave themselves permission to know and love each other. The participant-leaders of worship share different responsibilities for all who were gathered in the sanctuary, or listened and watched on various virtual platforms. Doing so enabled our community to cultivate an understanding of mutual and shared affinity, respect, and appreciation for one another.

This experience informed and strengthened my church's resolve to develop a deep compassion for one another. It was here, in these roles, in worship, that we modeled and

practiced how to love and work collaboratively as a beloved community in the church and then, with others in the community. There is more work to be done yet I believe God will complete transformation at Emmanuel Church as part of Emmanuel's destiny.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the wonderful family of Emmanuel Church who with God's help have the capacity to do great things, and my wife Debra who provided encouragement and space.

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
The Beloved Community.....	7
A Call For Prophetic Imagination.....	10
Status Quo: Monolithic Worship.....	12
Emmanuel History.....	15
Public Theology.....	18
The Public Square.....	21
Worship.....	22
Black Cultural Worship.....	24
Catalyst For Change.....	26
Taking it to The Streets.....	31
The Global Pandemic, Race and Politics.....	34
Community Peace and Justice Network.....	36
Emmanuel’s First Multiracial Multicultural Worship Service.....	38
Emmanuel’s Second Multiracial Multicultural Worship Service.....	46
Behold New Things.....	53
Measures to Get There.....	54
Conclusion.....	57
Bibliography.....	59

Appendix 1: Emmanuel Worship Guide (WS1).....	62
Appendix 2: Emmanuel Worship Guide (WS2).....	66
Appendix 3: WS1 Content and Message.....	69
Appendix 4: WS2: Content and Message.....	78
Appendix 5: Emmanuel Affiliations.....	86

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

On this journey, I've been aided by some exceptional public theologians, including the Rev. Dr. J. Terry Todd, the Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis, the Rev. John Janka, the Rev. Dr. Ken Gill, the Rev. Dr. Donald Wheeler, Mitch Wood, and the first Drew Theological School Public Theology Cohort.



## INTRODUCTION

### Personal History

As an Associate Pastor at Emmanuel Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey (Emmanuel), I have the privilege and honor to be the first person of color hired to serve the Emmanuel congregation. It all started a few years ago when I visited Emmanuel one Sunday morning for worship. The senior minister was absent on that day so I completed the visitor card and requested a call to speak with him when he was available. A few days later, the Reverend Dr. Ken Gill reached out to me and invited me for coffee. We had a delightful conversation about his background and what Emmanuel was doing in the community. I shared my ministerial experiences and community outreach with youth. Shortly after my first meeting with Pastor Gill, he called and invited me to another meeting. It was during that meeting that he asked me if I would consider working part-time at Emmanuel with families, youth, and to periodically assist with the worship services. I was taken aback by Dr. Gill's offer because I did not get the impression that my background was something they needed. As God would have it, my ministry history coincided with what Dr. Gill believed Emmanuel needed at the time.

From the moment I arrived, my heart was to become an embodiment of diversity and inclusivity to a predominately white congregation. Growing up in a poor, diverse community in Paterson, New Jersey, I found solace in the church and sports to keep me out of the dangerous and illegal activities that so many young Black males succumb to in "the hood." Drugs, gangs, and violence were prevalent and seen as the only way to survive.

At a young age, I was aware of the racial injustices and inequalities towards Blacks in regards to socio-economic limitations, employment opportunities, and high incarceration rates. My mother is from Carthage, a small town in North Carolina. As a young person, she participated in civil rights protests in Fayetteville, North Carolina to desegregate lunch counters in department stores. My mother brought a spirit of consciousness and activism into our home. She made a point of stressing to my siblings and myself the importance of knowing who you are and being active in your community to make change. Her example made me appreciate my own consciousness in giving back to my community.

My mother made a point to speak to us about the Civil Rights Movement and the great work of other civil rights organizations. I still recall April 4, 1968, the day Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. Not only is this date recorded in our history books, but it is also my mother's birthday. At five years old, I remember our family watching the news on the small black and white Zenith television in the living room. We were decorating the inside of our house for the birthday celebration which was a festive family event. Yet on that day, the ethos of our home swayed dramatically from merriment to shock and sorrow.

I was glued to the news on the television. As guests arrived, many were in tears. There was a great deal of hugging, crying, and watching the events on the screen in disbelief. Dr. King was a hero in my home, community, and around the world. I also vividly recall a few years later going to work with my father when he worked part-time as a dry cleaning delivery driver. My father also had a full-time job at the local Wonder Bread factory. Yet on this particular day, he allowed me to go for a ride with him to make a delivery in a fancy town called Ridgewood.

All of the houses were beautiful with large front lawns. Trees lined the streets and everything was very clean. This neighborhood was nothing like our streets in Paterson. Sitting in the van waiting for him to return I became impatient. I jumped out of the van, marched to the front door, and rang the bell. An African-American woman in a white and gray maid's uniform answered. The moment she saw me, her eyes went from shocked to sad. I said, "I'm waiting for my father. He's still in there right?" She replied, "Oh no young man. You have to go around to the back door." She closed the door in my face. I remember saying to myself, *one day I'm going to buy a house in Ridgewood and I'm not going to have to come through the back door!* Low and behold when my wife and I were looking for a home in 1997, Ridgewood was not on our list. However, it turned out that the town had the best house for us. God is always working things out for our good.

As I grew older, I studied Dr. King's life, his speeches, and his time pastoring Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. It was because of Dr. King's work that I've been drawn to imagine a country and a world that is diverse and inclusive. I have often wondered whether multiracial multicultural Christian churches could eradicate systemic racism, cultural stereotypes, and provide a worship experience where everyone feels that the service speaks directly to them. After all, God's church is universal, "For in one Spirit we are all baptized in one body whether Jews, Greeks...and all were made to drink of one Spirit."<sup>1</sup> In addition, Paul states, "Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it." This statement provides an illustration of the human body as a body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27).

---

<sup>1</sup> (1 Cor 12:13)

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the New International Version, Zondervan NIV Study Bible (K.L. Barker, Ed., Full rev.ed) (2002) Zondervan.

What will it take to transform Emmanuel into providing a truly diverse and inclusive worship experience? First, leadership needs to be willing to have sensitive, yet candid conversations about race and gender in meetings and from the pulpit. These vital discussions must complement the current demographics as well as be relevant to the current events and racial climate. Second, the congregation of approximately 75% white members (See Table 2 below) must be open-minded to a new generation's desire to know God in an intimate, yet all-inclusive, non-monolithic way. Third, Emmanuel must work with outside partners on a local and national level to provide resources, tools, and information to educate leaders and volunteers in carrying out new worship experiences. This may include other agencies such as the local Black Lives Matter chapter, Bergen County NAACP, and the Community Peace and Justice Network (CPJN). Fourth, leadership and the congregation must view this transformation as an on-going learning process for everyone and be flexible and pivot as necessary. Change will not happen overnight and the process of introducing new songs, artists, and other creative forms of expression will be done in phases to occur gradually.

In serving as the Associate Pastor for Youth and Young Adult Programs at Emmanuel since 2018, I have prayerfully used my platform to make every effort to utilize a team that is diverse in many ways, including race, ethnicity, age, and gender. I want individuals to use their gifts to bless our congregation in a worship experience that embodies a multiracial multicultural faith community. Based on feedback from my youth and young adults, and other congregants, they desire a more uplifting service that reflects seeking God in a more celebratory way.

For this Doctor of Ministry project, I worked to produce two experimental multiracial multicultural services. The first service took place during Advent 2020, and the second service occurred in January 2021. The duration of each service was one hour and fifteen minutes. Both services were videotaped and are available for viewing in the Drew University Library. The order of the program for Worship Service One (WS1) and Worship Service Two (WS2) are provided in Appendices 1 and 2. In addition, the unison readings, and sermon topic and context, are provided in Appendices 3 and 4.

I relied on internal and external partners to help with this project. A consultation committee of pastors and lay people was formed to help narrow the focus of this project's worship services. The consultation committee was diverse in race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, and socioeconomic class. This group consisted of six individuals who are Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Quaker and unaffiliated. There were four females and two males.

Participants on the consultation committee were familiar with my ministry context as members of Emmanuel, leaders in the Village of Ridgewood where the church is situated and beyond. My conversations with them enabled me to listen and learn from critiques and questions. Discussing the usage of multiracial multicultural worship services allowed me to consider their perspectives. Some wondered if Emmanuel was ready for this. Others thought that this was needed at Emmanuel and in the Village of Ridgewood. Each person has attended Emmanuel at least once and some have spoken at the church as a guest. The varying degrees of the council's personal and professional experience has given me guidance in the formation of a multiracial, multicultural worship service.

This project is one that the council affirmed as very promising for my ministry context. The consensus was that the public square will embrace Emmanuel's diversity and

for being a diverse and inclusive model for social justice collaboration work. One of my consultation readers and an elder at Emmanuel told me that I am the introduction to and embodiment of diversity and inclusivity at Emmanuel Church. Other people of color are members of Emmanuel but they have always been the minority. I was told that I am the first person of color ever called and hired to serve the Emmanuel congregation. He went on to say that the multiracial and multicultural work that I have intentionally introduced to the congregation, is because I'm at Emmanuel. This is what he said with joy and enthusiasm, "This is just the beginning of what God is using you to do here. Now we are all doing this together." What this member shared is what reverberates in my mind and heart when I imagine working with others as we worship together celebrating the reign of God on earth.

Implementing a multiracial multicultural worship experience will likely achieve the following outcomes: 1) Attract newcomers who are not affiliated with a church as the seating capacity can hold a little over 200 people; 2) Provide a direct response to residents in the broader community seeking a welcoming church regardless of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation; and 3) Position the church to be actively engaged in social justice causes that directly and indirectly affect the congregation. I am honored to have been chosen for this assignment and with God's direction, grace, and mercy, I believe Emmanuel's transformation is on the way.

### The Beloved Community

I believe that a multiracial multicultural worship service can be a model for a beloved community. Although Josiah Royce put forth the concept of the beloved community, it was made memorable by Martin Luther King, Jr. I think of what happened

shortly after Pentecost according to Acts 2:44-47 and I imagine a beloved community. This text affirms and demonstrates what occurred within the community of believers in God who shared what they had.

I believe that God wants believers to gather together and share what they have with each other. I believe that God wants us to share what we value with those who have a need. The believers met with each other daily and ate with each other gladly according to the text. I believe that when a community shares a meal it deepens its intimacy as we practice something that we all must do no matter who we are; eat, commune. The believers praised God and were blessed by others who were on the outside of their community.

Our praise to God is worship. This worship, which is almost always done inside a church building, brings about blessings from those who aren't in our immediate community. I believe this happens because those on the outside recognize the sincere holy of God in us and our devotion to God and service to God's human creation. In the believer's worship, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. My understanding is that people's lives were being revolutionized. They were being changed for the good and better. Our worship which is a rehearsal of the reign of God brings others into our faith community and they are blessed and become a blessing to others. This rehearsal of the reign of God demonstrates the love of God by and with God's creation.

Acts 4:32-35 is another example of worship. It is another way of imagining the beloved community. The believers were one in heart and mind and shared everything. It is no coincidence that Scripture emphasizes the significance of sharing. God wants us to understand and know that this is important in the faith community. The apostles who were the leaders in this context, with great power shared their testimonies about the resurrection

of the Lord Jesus and God's grace was powerfully at work in all of them. A very important experience God wants us to know is that God's grace can work powerfully in everyone and not just those in leadership. This is valuable because it is important for people to know that God's grace is available to them and they don't have to be formal or certified or ordained leaders. God's grace is not exclusive. God's grace is inclusive and available to all. This passage states that the proceeds from the property that were sold, was brought to the leaders and it was distributed to those in need. This is what a model of the beloved community can be.

I have wondered if Emmanuel worries about a transition to a multiracial multicultural worship service because Black behavior may take over. Emmanuel is asked to become and to be, antiracist. The fear of what it means to be Black and what worship may look like if a multiracial multicultural service is implemented is counterproductive. Being an antiracist means abandoning these thoughts and imagining new ways of thinking and worshipping as a diverse faith community.

In his book, *How to be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi states,

Racist" and "antiracist" are like peelable name tags that are placed and replaced based on what someone is doing or not doing, supporting, or expressing in each moment. These are not permanent tattoos. No one becomes a racist or antiracist. We can only strive to be one or the other. We can unknowingly strive to be a racist. We can knowingly strive to be an antiracist. Like fighting an addiction, being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination.<sup>2</sup>

The modern church often expects people to come in and give something to it. The beloved community church gives to those who come to worship. It gives to those who gather and rehearse the reign of God. There is a tension that must not be overlooked as I

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 23.



consider the beloved community. There's difficulty reconciling the biblical context with modernity. However, the beloved community in modernity can create what it chooses to be as it strives to worship God and rehearse what we can be as believers in God.

Luke 10:25-37 helps me to think about the outcome of our rehearsal. This text demonstrates what righteous living looks like in a just society. An egalitarian/beloved community is one where there isn't poverty of any kind. The people recognize that their survival is intrinsically connected to each other. The beloved community is characterized by God's love in an active relationship with neighbors and the victim, in Luke 10 is the neighbor, the one whom Jesus is instructing the lawyer and the disciples to love. Jesus interprets the commandment to love the neighbor as a command to care for the other—whoever finds themselves outside of her or his most similar or immediate, easiest, socially acceptable group of friends. This is how I am processing my understanding of the beloved community. The beloved community is one that worships God with diversity and inclusivity, as one body of believers. An iteration of that for me is a multiracial multicultural worship service in a congregation that will rehearse God's reign on earth as one unified community.

#### A Call For Prophetic Imagination

In an interview on the show "On Being" with the theologian and professor emeritus Walter Brueggemann, Krista Tippett asked him about the meaning of his term "prophetic imagination." Brueggemann explained that the prophets of the Bible were rooted in their traditions and were without pedigree. He went on to say that, "They embody tradition and imagination, gifted by their insight." Equally worth noting is that Brueggemann believed that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Biblical poet. *What? Biblical poet?* I said to myself.

As I was listening to Brueggemann's words my eyes widened. Then I immediately felt a sensation in my ears since King's prophetic lyrical writings and sermons have always captured me. You would be hard-pressed to find a person young or old who could not attribute the words, "I have a dream," to Dr. King, and so much more. I have come to learn that my prophetic imagination is what causes me to desire a multiracial multicultural diverse and inclusive church, and I believe that God has chosen me for this assignment.

Jesus was a servant leader. In John 13:1-3, after the Passover feast, Jesus washed the disciples' feet. His act of servanthood is one of the greatest Christlike attributes we can have. I have always aspired to be a servant leader and have dedicated my life to helping others, volunteering for the betterment of people and communities, and preaching the Gospel. I have admired the writings of Robert Greenleaf, a well-known visionary and servant leader, whose book, *Servant leadership: A Journey Into The Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, calls for us to advance the Kingdom of God through dreaming and vision. Greenleaf says, "Someone in the church must paint the dream. For anything to happen there must be a dream. And for anything great to happen, there must be a great dream. The growing edge church will be a painter of great dreams for all of its people, something to lift their sights above the ordinary and give them a great goal to strive for—something for each person to strive for" (2002, p. 101).<sup>3</sup>

In Cornel West's book, *Black Prophetic Fire*, he speaks about Martin Luther King, Jr. "And to put a smile on his face is to be willing to live and die and bear witness on behalf of those who are wrestling with all four of those issues: militarism, materialism, racism, and poverty."<sup>4</sup> My prophetic imagination takes me to the same issues that

---

<sup>3</sup> Robert Greenleaf, *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness 25th Anniversary Edition* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2002), 101.

<sup>4</sup> Cornel West and Christa Buschendorf, *Black Prophetic Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 83.

concerned Martin King long before I knew that each one mattered to him. I imagine what the destruction may look like for those who are not wealthy and well connected. I wonder if they will ever find relief in a nation that cares so little for those who have less. I am also hopeful which is why I continue the work I do. I believe that an intentional, multiracial multicultural worship that rehearses the reign of God on earth teaches and prepares us to love others and to do the work that's necessary to improve the quality of life for all of God's human creation. I hope my work puts a smile on Dr. King's face.

My dream and vision for Emmanuel is that frequent diverse and inclusive worship experiences may inspire the members of color to invite other people of color of all ages to church and appeal to the religiously unaffiliated who may find interest and inspiration in this uplifting and energetic format. In this way, Emmanuel may have the opportunity to accurately model the beloved community. My hopeful intention is to create and provide the Emmanuel congregation with a multiracial, multicultural, diverse and inclusive worship service and use this as a rehearsal of God's reign on earth and as a witness to collaborate with others in the public square.

In seeking to create this new worship experience at Emmanuel, I have intentionally implemented a few key steps towards change. First, I work with our artistic director to decide on the hymns and special music selections. Second, I assign a specific artist to sing for a particular Sunday. Third, I discern how to craft my sermon while paying attention to what's happening globally and locally by reading and watching reputable media, as well as engaging in discussion groups at Emmanuel so that I have an awareness of what is important to the congregants.

---

This work has also sparked my imagination about how a diverse congregation can participate in social justice work in its community. The intent and hope is that as the church grows and evolves, it will deepen the relationships in the congregation through worship as a rehearsal of God's reign. It's time for all of the leaders of Emmanuel to seek God to enhance their own prophetic imagination.

#### Status Quo: Monolithic Worship

Many church services are mono-cultural because they knowingly and sometimes singularly identify with a common, similar race and ethnic group that meets and satisfies a preference for familiarity and desirability. Some expressions of worship are singular by race and ethnicity, most likely because of their learned prejudice, which is reinforced toward others. Such a common stance confirms a bias from which they do not want to detach themselves from. Churches operating under this deeply rooted thinking and practice can become so inherent that it becomes normal. Often, the position of "that's how we always do it" quite possibly is used to justify a segregated Christian worship. The notion of integrating a mono-cultural worship service is often met with tremendous resistance.

The call for diverse and inclusive worship challenges the narratives that some know and understand about themselves and their communities. Choosing to worship monolithically is certainly a respected choice as there is tremendous value and meaning in doing so. To inform a church that its monolithic worship isn't what God desires it to be is insulting. For many, it devalues their history, identity, and worth. My claim here isn't to make an assertion of unimportance, yet I believe that more education in Scripture can help alleviate the resistance. Granted, there will still be some congregants that hold on to their biases, but I pray that the majority seeking a worship transformation outweighs the

minority. My prophetic imagination allows me to visualize many kinds of people who believe in God worshipping together and ultimately working collaboratively in the public square.

The worship service at Emmanuel isn't reaching many different people consistently. The service reaches more people on the Sundays when I preach. Before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I had the opportunity to invite people to attend. Particularly, former students who would often come with their parents, siblings, and friends. During the pandemic, the service was being streamed online. Most people were watching remotely in real-time or viewing at their convenience. The electronic platforms are great and allow Emmanuel to track online activity. Based on the analytics, we noticed that more people watched the service in real-time when I preached. An electronic church newsletter is released two days in advance of the service and it includes the name of the preacher for the upcoming week. I will not attest that the numbers are greater because I'm the designated preacher. Instead, I'm led to believe that more log on because the service on that day represents diversity.

The diversity that I'm describing here is multiracial, multicultural, and gender inclusive. There is a certainty that the leaders of the worship service are going to include people of color. Some of the worship service leaders may also be people of color who will speak in their native, non-English first language. This kind of diversity, albeit small, has proven to be meaningful. Some attendees at the worship service will express before leaving how good it was to hear a poem spoken in Spanish, their first language. The preacher of the day creates most of the service and selects the persons who will participate. While this

is good, we do not have diversity each week. Therefore, we sometimes miss the opportunity to welcome and include many different people on a weekly basis.

Emmanuel finds itself in a period of transition. The congregation has aged and many have already relocated to warmer climates or have passed away. These last few years have demonstrated that a younger ethnic minority of people have visited, but do not always stay for long. In some of my conversations with these people, they have stated candidly and with some embarrassment that the worship service is “too white.” What I understand from this is that the service lacks an outward emotional expression. Some have said that the service is too traditional, and sometimes too formal. I know the people who made these comments and they are accustomed to clapping their hands and using their voices in worship as a way of engaging God with others who do the same in worship. They expressed how they enjoyed getting to know the white congregants, but they hoped for more human diversity, more people of color, and more freedom to use their bodies and voices as a way of praise during worship. What’s striking about this is that they weren’t looking for a church to meet all of their ethnic preferences; they simply wanted cultural diversity and greater verbal participation in the service. They specifically shared that it would be good to see people in worship leadership at Emmanuel that looked like them.

### Emmanuel History

Emmanuel is 130 years old. Established as a Baptist Church in 1891, Emmanuel is located in the Village of Ridgewood, New Jersey. Like many other churches with this longevity, its history is replete with both growth and pains. It is composed primarily of upper-middle-income and wealthy white members. Most of the congregation is made up of

active and passionate members of the Silver demographic cohort. Emmanuel’s mission statement is “Emmanuel A Welcoming Church.” The website and other literature describes it as a place for spiritual growth and to inform discernment in church life, mission, and social action. Emmanuel’s online marketing also makes a point to state that it is a place for inclusiveness/hospitality in race, age, gender, sexual orientation, and special needs...”<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: Ridgewood Village New Jersey (2019)<sup>6</sup>**

Total population: 25,056
White, not Hispanic or Latino: 73% Black or African American alone: 1.9% Asian: 14.75 Hispanic or Latino: 7.8%
Median Value of Owner-Occupied Housing Units: \$738,700 Median Selected Monthly Owner Costs (with mortgage): \$4,000+ Median Selected Monthly Owner Costs (without mortgage): \$1,500+ Median Gross Rent: \$1,996
High School Graduates or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+ 2014-2018, 96.5% Bachelor's Degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+ 2014-2018, 75.4%
Median Household Income: \$168,608 Persons in poverty: 4.2%

Change in any group can be extremely challenging. In this congregation, some welcome new ideas if they reinforce the present practices. The congregants are people who express their desire to know God more intimately and to serve God’s creation. I have come to learn about and experience the various programs the church has created to assist others in the congregation and the community. The people of Emmanuel teach English as a

<sup>5</sup> <https://emmanuelridgewood.org/>

<sup>6</sup> United States Census Bureau QuickFacts, accessed 12/5/2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ridgewoodvillagenewjersey/PST120219>.

second language, they donate and purchase clothes for people, provide academic scholarships, donate their sweat equity to build homes in inner cities, and contribute money to various aid organizations. They often seek consensus as they strive to honor God by loving one another as Scripture teaches. A major area of resistance is in the style and presentation of worship.

Emmanuel is intergenerational and intelligent. The congregation is composed of many who value critical thinking and new ideas. Generally, Emmanuel congregants are compassionate and caring people. At times, I think some of the congregants are polite to a fault. They do not like the slightest controversy and will avoid it as best they can. While I don't intentionally try to stir controversy, I am willing to preach what I understand to be the truth and what I believe God wants us to hear. Considering who the congregants are, I thought that it was necessary to preach the sermon that was relevant to society's racial tensions and the results of the presidential election. I wanted to address publicly for all of us what I believed was important. I affirmed and validated those who voted for Joe Biden and more importantly, reminded us of our obligation to be active participants in our communities as people who know God and are willing to love others for God.

As a church, Emmanuel is one of the lived-out spaces for congregants to worship and know God. In doing so, conflict inevitably surfaces in Emmanuel's effort to be diverse and inclusive. Congregations have to discuss the sensitive issues of race and gender no matter how difficult that may be to those who are faithful longtime members. According to Jacqueline J. Lewis and John Janka in *The Pentecost Paradigm: Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multicultural Congregation*, the conversation must be continuous and



intertwined into the church's life. This dialogue can be informative and liberating.<sup>7</sup> This is the hope of an alternative to conflict as it deepens an understanding of God's liberating justice and makes available honest interaction, trust, and resolve. Emmanuel is having sensitive, yet timely conversations about race and what it means if they become a church that is racially and ethnically diverse. My hope is that we once again read *The Pentecost Paradigm* as well as using the accompanying workbook in committee meetings and during congregational meetings to implement a few of the ten steps suggested by Lewis and Janka, including managing change and resistance, understanding congregational conflict, and celebrating in worship, to deal with the racial and ethnic tensions that are dividing congregations. Taking this type of action is a positive step in the right direction.

### Public Theology

In transitioning a predominantly white congregation into a multiracial multicultural worship experience, intentional collaboration is required. Such a new paradigm of worship entails an understanding of Public Theology. This kind of community that rehearses the reign of God inside its walls through worship can also serve God outside of its walls to build a larger community following.

The grounding in public theology is to teach and model a moral and ethical understanding of who God is and God's compassion in the public square for all of God's creation. It isn't enough to amplify and celebrate theology cloistered within a framed building. The objective of a theology of God is often exemplified in private worship and shared with the public as allies, sisters and brothers, and collaborators.

---

<sup>7</sup>Jacqueline J. Lewis and John Janka, *The Pentecost Paradigm: Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 74.

A working definition of Public Theology for this purpose comes from Sebastian Kim and Katie Day’s “Introduction” to *The Brill Companion to Public Theology* (2017).<sup>8</sup> “Public Theology refers to the church reflectively engaging with those within and outside its institutions on issues of common interest and for the common good.” (Kim and Day, 2) This definition calls our attention to the traffic across the boundaries of religious institutions (churches, seminaries, monasteries, for example) and the busy and complicated public world beyond: note the emphasis on engagement. According to E. Harold Breitenberg, Jr., Public Theology is “theologically informed public discourse about public issues, addressed to the church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other religious body, as well as the larger public or publics, argued in ways that can be evaluated and judged by publicly available warrants and criteria”.<sup>9</sup> As above, Public Theology is a “discourse” (a way of speaking), and I would add, practice and symbol (art, performance or as Baldwin describes a protest “a dance”) that speaks to both churches and temples, or other structures, as well as to people and institutions outside of those religious institutions, in ways that people on the outside of religious institutions can hear and understand.

On June 29, 2020, during a Zoom call, my cohorts and I had the privilege of listening and interacting with Ruby Sales, a prominent social justice activist, scholar, and public theologian. Ms. Sales stated, “Public theology interprets the meaning of the moment to the people,” in continuity with folk theologies. It is the goal of public theology to “open up doors and pathways out of moral nihilism” and into a different future. Public theology is “a theology that enables our dry bones to live again rather than to bend [in despair] . . .”

---

<sup>8</sup> Katie Day and Sebastian Kim, “Introduction, in *The Brill Companion to Public Theology*, (Massachusetts: BRILL, 2017), 2, ”[https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004336063\\_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004336063_002).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.4.

Public theology intentionally addresses public concerns by way of public policies. It includes engagement with politics, media, religious communities, academic institutions, civil society, and various markets such as economics, banks and corporations. A moral and ethical approach to matters in the public square that intends to secure a better quality of life for all creation is how I understand public theology.

With this understanding of public theology, there are particular aspects that helped me think about how to cultivate multiracial multicultural Christian churches, how Black Bodies are understood, God's justice, the impact of racism and the lives of women. In *The Pentecost Paradigm: Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multicultural Congregation*, Lewis and John, offers ways to think about how the Christian Church can orient itself toward diversity, inclusivity and, be an effective voice and instrument for social justice in the public square.<sup>10</sup> In *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, Kelly Brown Douglas, challenges readers to consider how God's justice requires humanity to know and value Black people and how she refuses to be consoled until God's justice is made real in the world.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the book, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*, Traci C. West, uses a Christian social ethics approach to peer at antiracism from a feminist and womanist perspective which can lead to cultural and policy changes in congregations and the public square. West points toward a liberating Christian social ethic whereby Christians do more than what is listed in their mission statement.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Jacqueline J. Lewis and John Janka, *The Pentecost Paradigm: Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Kelly Brown Douglass, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015), 232.

<sup>12</sup> Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 113-116.

This makes the potential work of a multiracial multicultural congregation a very real and sincere effort of establishing an identity that is diverse and inclusive. A multiracial multicultural worship service is a starting place that points toward this more expansive reality in my ministry context.

The worship I want us to experience in our community should send us out into the public square more enabled. We live, work and play in the public square. We need our worship to provide us with what we need to be our best and give our best to others outside of our gathering space. This is why rehearsal is so important; it prepares us for community engagement. Our worship should not be for us alone. Our worship should always send us out into the community with an expansive willingness and capability to love and serve others.

### The Public Square

The public square that can be transformed by a multiracial multicultural worship experience at a predominantly white church has many prongs. The starting place begins with the Emmanuel congregation and then into the Village of Ridgewood where Emmanuel is located. The public widens as it also includes persons who watch and participate in the ministry remotely. The public extends to the county, state, nation, and global community. The public is inclusive of those who the ministry reaches out to and welcomes as they enter into the presence of God in Emmanuel's offerings whether it be physical, virtual/audio and visual, print, and more.

The intended impact of this ongoing work is to demonstrate and fulfill the need for a diverse and inclusive worship service for our congregation. Drawing from the

diversity that already exists at Emmanuel, there is an opportunity for a worship service that values many different people. By doing this regularly it affirms what some people in the congregation believe is needed. The inclusivity of this action can enhance the value of worship for the entire congregation.

In addition, I was fortunate to meet with a student at Drew Theological School who is also a Ridgewood resident. She became a participant in the monthly racism seminar and accepted our invitation to join us for worship service. Not long afterwards, she received approval to satisfy her internship requirement working with us. After the February Race Together seminar, a participant contacted me and asked if I could help her donate one million dollars to a youth program in Paterson, New Jersey. Emmanuel's footprint in the community has allowed me to facilitate and coordinate other youth programs to do even more good work in the public square that I am collaborating with.

### Worship

We must never forget that worship is a corporate event, as well as an individual experience, that will be a part of heaven and earth. "Worship is a prayer of relationship in which the whole creation lauds and magnifies God the Creator and Redeemer of the world" (Webber, 1998, p. 36). He further cites numerous passages such as Psalm 8, 19, 65, 104, and 148 that express worship to God as Creator. I would add to the above-listed passages Exodus 16 and Exodus 20:8-11 as validation of the importance of worship to our Creator. Exodus 16 shows God's love for God's people.

Worship is about becoming more equipped to engage with the community outside of the confines of the church structure. It is what happens in worship that deepens and

strengthens the congregation to become those who are able to interact with others beyond its walls and collaborate on matters that are good for many people. Worship is a rehearsal that prepares us to do this work. It is preparation for the mission work we are called to do. Worship readies us to be the people who can carry out the mission work in the public square. It enables us to better welcome and bring others into worship with us. We move in and out, back and forth as a congregation that is now more able and familiar with our own mission as we strive toward being a better community member.

Jesus ministered to Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Gentiles, regardless of their status. He lived in a multicultural world where the economic and political power was uneven. Jesus wanted us to make disciples and baptize all nations (Matt. 18:19). (See Samaritan woman, leper, Naman, and many others.) God designed for us to be in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26). As we are God's offspring we should be operating in unity and connectedness (Gen. 1:31). The beloved community is one that worships God with diversity and inclusivity, as one body of believers. An iteration of that for me is a multiracial multicultural worship service in a congregation that will rehearse God's reign on earth as one unified community.

I believe that God's preference is for God's many different kinds of people to worship God together; this is the beloved community. This kind of worship demonstrates the presence of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It declares that God is God of all and when we worship together it is a demonstrative rehearsal of God's reign on earth. In this kind of worship, God is working in us and through us for the purpose of molding us to better know God and do what God wants us to do. It is a rehearsal. It is practice. It is an

expression of adoration to God. In essence, God is being showered with praise and we are receiving a pouring down of blessings from God.

Scripture states, “And have them make me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them” (Exod 25:8). The Church’s most relevant reason for its existence is in providing a meeting place for God and humanity to come together in worship and praise. When we meet God, several things should happen. We should catch a glimpse of God’s glory and present our worship to God through praise, and adoration. The worship service is a place where we can see and experience God’s glory.

This is what inspires and empowers God’s people. In this kind of worship, we find God’s compassion, deliverance, and renewal. With this kind of worship, God is being revered and honored. This kind of worship changes lives as we recognize the power of God working in us and through us. Again, this worship is a rehearsal for the reign of God on earth. Revelation 21: 3-5 states: See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” This is God being present with us in our worship. As we worship corporately, participating as worship leaders, congregants, and visitors in the pews and elsewhere, we are united in calling on one Spirit. Our call to worship, liturgy, sacraments, sermons, solos, and choir renditions and more, is an act of love directed toward God, even as God is loving us in that moment. Again, we are rehearsing the reign of God. We do this first before we can do God’s work in the community outside of our congregational gathering.

## Black Cultural Worship

The call and response practice found in many traditional Black churches and in other congregations that are not Black isn't a normal practice at Emmanuel. Responding out loud to a song or the preached word is uncommon at Emmanuel. Researcher and writer, Marilyn Mellowes provides a historical perspective of Black worship. Mellowes described "the shouting and rejoicing in the Black church to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln in 1863 as a reenactment of Exodus when God liberated the chosen people. Churches in the north organized missions to help freed Blacks attain skills to improve their lives."<sup>13</sup> After Lincoln's signing of this historical document, independent Black churches began forming in the North, led by AME Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne. Establishing schools and higher learning institutions was Payne's mission. Yet Payne was against loud, expressive forms of worship, and believed worship should have a more proper style.<sup>14</sup> In her article, Mellowes describes the conflict of the worship styles in the North versus the South.

But there were tensions. Some Northerners, ... did not approve of the emotional worship style of their Southern counterparts; [Payne] stressed that "true" Christian worship meant proper decorum and attention to reading the Bible. Many Southerners were disinterested in Payne's admonitions. They liked their emotive form of worship and saw no reason to cast it aside. Nevertheless, most black Southerners ended up joining independent black churches that had been formed in the North before the Civil War. These included the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ). In 1870, Southerners formed

---

<sup>13</sup> Marilyn Mellowes, "The Black Church," accessed 6/28/2021, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/godinamerica-black-church/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



the Colored (now "Christian") Methodist Episcopal Church, and in 1894, black Baptists formed the National Baptist Convention.<sup>15</sup>

In my discussions with congregants and visitors, I've been told that being a part of a faith community that includes many different races and cultures is important. This importance has to do with their convicted belief that God wants and prefers a congregation that depicts a variety of God's human creation worshipping together. Additionally, my college students who visited Emmanuel have expressed similar concerns upon returning to the classroom. The students are multiracial and multiethnic and they attend a worship service at Emmanuel on various Sundays during the academic fall and spring semesters. These students range in age from 18-22. Some of the students have a church background but not all of them, and some are religiously unaffiliated. Generally, the students express an interest in a religious service that is energetic and relevant. What they convey is how they enjoy music that appeals to them and a lesson that addresses their current life concerns or something that is happening in the world that affects them.

Besides students, the matter of an attractive and impactful worship service has been discussed during Emmanuel's monthly executive council meetings, attended by committee members and the congregation. The executive council is the governing body for the congregation. Some congregants and committee leaders have stated that Emmanuel must create a worship service that a younger and diverse population may have an interest in. It appears that many want the same thing, so the key is creating a plan to get there.

One challenge is that even when there are people of color participating in the service, there still isn't enough energy to liven the moment. The ethos isn't joyful or

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

celebratory. There isn't an enlivened expressiveness that is often experienced in other worship services that are led and attended by mostly people of color. The diversity of the artists is minimal since there's only one regular non-white vocalist who is a special music feature by way of video. This addition is welcomed as it presents a gifted young black man who is seen and heard as an important part of the worship service. To add to the lack of energy issue, the preaching, although theologically sound, does not always resonate with people of color because it lacks their kind of enthusiasm and inspiration. As it stands, the periodic participation of a person of color reading a poem or Scripture isn't satisfactory because this doesn't happen regularly.

#### Catalyst For Change

Shortly after the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, conversations at Emmanuel on race and social justice began to take shape. I provide weekly leadership sessions for a group of young adults at Emmanuel. This cohort ranges in age from 22-30 and the group is racially and culturally mixed. A small number are white and grew up at Emmanuel, but the group is mostly Black and Latinx and are former students whom I taught at William Paterson University. One participant asked me if Emmanuel congregants would be willing to meet and discuss racism in America.

As the Holy Spirit began blowing new winds through Emmanuel, the Generation Z cohort became galvanized after the killing of George Floyd. After this tragic incident, on its own, the Generation Z cohort created an outline and requested a congregational meeting. They stated that they wanted to discuss a regular new style of worship and a practical antiracist approach. After I took this to the executive council the discussion group

was approved. There was an openness expressed during the meeting by the congregation's members and senior minister. Everyone agreed that there should be more diversity in the worship service, especially with music.

As it turned out, one of the young adults stated that all of the artwork on the church's campus and the stained glass windows depicted white people. She went on to say that this did not always make her feel welcomed because she didn't see any images that portrayed her race which is Black. After affirming this young woman, this was acknowledged by the executive council and the moderator promised to make some changes. During the following month, a portrait of Martin Luther King, Jr. was installed in the library and a social justice banner was hung in the main corridor of the church. This was a small beginning to much larger changes that followed.

Different members of the executive council stated that Emmanuel welcomed all people. They asked the young adult cohort to help them learn more about racial dynamics and acts of racism that they aren't always aware of. A decision was made to organize a formal platform that could be used to teach the congregation and the community about systemic racism.

Many voices were heard and relationships were strengthened when our church community took steps to become allies and collaborators. The arrival at mutual and equitable affirmation required work within the church before we could effectively engage with the larger community. Fellowship with others in the congregation first, was important for intimacy and honesty, before we leaned into the community as collaborators. Digging

into and unmasking biases of generation-long prejudices and practices was important and necessary.

Antiracist and antisexist readings from Ibram X. Kendi's, *How to be an Antiracist*,<sup>16</sup> as well as Michelle Alexander's, *The New Jim Crow*<sup>17</sup> were read and discussed. These books were important tools that we used and we continue to learn about both. Addressing the sin of racial, ethnic, and sexist prejudice and discrimination was difficult but liberating. Repentance happened when some admitted their own sin against others who had been harmed. These were all necessary for our church to advance toward a life of service unto God and God's created humans in the church and the community.

The optics of racial and cultural diversity at Emmanuel is important. I am not stating that by only having multiracial and multicultural worship did we achieve diversity and inclusivity, yet I am stating that the congregation of Emmanuel needed to see people of color leading the worship service. The fact that the Emmanuel congregation was given the opportunity to worship God as a diverse congregation rehearsing what I believe God intends for us to do as the early followers did was a great start. The worship service is the most central value at Emmanuel; it is the most important space of connectedness for the congregation.

What this multiracial, multicultural millennial, and Generation Z group desire is a worship service that doesn't sound and feel very Eurocentric and antiquated. This group is more interested in praise and worship music, a gospel choir, and not traditional hymns.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*, (New York: One World, 2019), 85.

<sup>17</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, (New York: The New Press, 2010), 185.

This group stated that if the worship service was more appealing, others, especially younger people will want to be a part of Emmanuel. The position they take is that their peers will gather to worship if the service resonated with them and if they were inspired to work collaboratively with others outside of the church.

People who lead worship are valued as important contributors to the life of the church. As a result of providing a worship service with racial and cultural diversity, some of those persons have been invited to join the executive council of Emmanuel. This happened after we worshipped as a diverse and inclusive faith community. This new visual dynamic is important because now people of color are in a position to make governing decisions that will help to create systemic changes at Emmanuel. Our worship provided us with the opportunity to normalize a diverse and inclusive congregation. For this reason, the preparation for the worship service was vitally important and I hope it becomes the norm.

In his book, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church*, Soong-Chan Rah states that “It is imperative, therefore, that different cultural expressions manifest themselves in the setting of the public worship life of the church.”<sup>18</sup> He also wrote that “The Sunday worship is the public face of the church, representing to some what the church is about.”<sup>19</sup> Sunday worship isn’t the only way of communicating what the church is about; however, it is still the primary expression for most churches. The representation of the church through its worship is important for the congregation and the community. It communicates to both who the church is. I want Emmanuel to imagine, live

---

<sup>18</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 171.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

within and work collaboratively in this ministry context as collaborators. I want our community to know Emmanuel as a multiracial multicultural church that can be relied upon to help build relationships and address social justice in the public square. I want the love and compassion from our multiracial multicultural congregation to become an instrument of God for communities outside of our gathering space.

When a majority culture is dominant, it is that culture that determines how power is used and distributed. The danger in a multicultural church is that we would repeat the mistakes the early church was making prior to the Jerusalem Council. The dominant group in power was not willing to yield its cultural values for the sake of those who were marginalized or alienated from that power.<sup>20</sup>

Emmanuel must be willing to yield its traditional cultural values of monolithic worship in order to create a regular multiracial multicultural worship experience. It has to share its power with people of color if we are going to create a diverse and inclusive church. The existence of Emmanuel hinges on both of these happening soon if it intends to have a future.

#### Taking it to The Streets

The social justice protest against the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 has awakened our congregation to systemic racism. There has been an acknowledgment by some that Black people, Black men in particular, are systematically discriminated against and specifically over-policed by law enforcement agencies that target this demographic. Some members and others who attend our church have participated in public demonstrations and engaged in Zoom conversations. I hosted one such gathering on a Sunday I preached just after the killing of George Floyd. Some in our space expressed

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 120

anger and sorrow. Others shared their surprise learning that life was even difficult for Black men and that they were even targeted at all after the election of the country's first Black president, Barack Obama. This gathering became a spontaneous and unorthodox worship, our second of the day. We prayed, talked, listened, lamented, and gave offerings of praise as we rehearsed the reign of God on earth on behalf of God's creation who needed God's help.

I thought about the meeting or second worship service after it concluded. I was surprised that some of Emmanuel's members didn't know the difficulty that Black men live with every day. I wasn't angry but I was disappointed. I thought that the Emmanuel congregation that takes pride in being well-read should've known. I decided that as hard as it might be, I was going to do my best with assistance from others, to help our congregation learn more about other groups of people in our country and what their real-life experiences are like. When we know more about the lives of others it helps us to love them as we should. The text I thought of immediately was 1 John 4:7, "Dear friends let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." It is our responsibility to love one another because it's what God requires of us. We can't truly be a people of God if we do not love all of God's human creation. Loving God's human creation means that we have to do a better job of getting to know those that don't look like us. I often hear Emmanuel members say, "We will all be alright if we just love each other." After that meeting I made a determination that a part of my calling to Emmanuel has to be helping us to know and love each other authentically, starting in this season of unrest.

Not long after the meeting, Emmanuel hosted a public demonstration in front of our building where a diverse gathering of people held signs decrying the murder of Mr. Floyd and in support of the Black Lives Matter Movement. The senior minister and executive council decided that it would be a good idea to stand in front of the church and hold banners that read either George Floyd or Black Lives Matter. The location is very strategic since Emmanuel is located on the main street that brings traffic in and out of the Village of Ridgewood. One of Emmanuel's members, an artist, made the signs. An email was sent to our distribution list and approximately 30 people showed up.

Emmanuel members invited neighbors and friends. Strangers walking by stopped and asked if they could join in and we welcomed them. Among others, I invited a Ridgewood resident and friend who is a proud middle-aged white male atheist. Motorists blew their horns and yelled out in solidarity. Some, especially those driving expensive cars, denounced our activity by shouting negative words from their windows. Throughout our time standing on the lawn, we talked with each other as friends, as sisters and brothers. Even though this was a serious matter, we found the ability to tell stories and laugh. Some people cried because their hearts were broken. We had fellowship with one another. This spontaneous band of protesters was white, Black, Latinx, and Asian.

This impromptu gathering was worship; it was a rehearsal of God's reign on earth. We celebrated our common God-created humanity as we called out for justice in public. What rang true for me in that moment was Psalm 133:1 "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" It was our collective hope that we could someday experience unity. At that moment I believe we had something close to it. There was an unspoken union that held us together as one people and we knew it.



In the book, *Taking It to the Streets: Public Theologies of Action and Resistance*, in chapter 5 "Protest and Resistance as the Liturgy of the People," Jennifer Baldwin states that "Protest, resistance and activism holds a special role in American society."<sup>21</sup> As a faith community we knew this and we were compelled to demonstrate publicly and admonish the failure of authority. This public demonstration for a politically moderate white congregation was significant but not fully welcomed and supported by all of Emmanuel's members. The senior minister expressed that some in the congregation were good people who did not support this kind of activism. He stated that it's likely Emmanuel may lose some people but perhaps gain others. This statement was important because it readied me and others for the likelihood of facing difficulty from some members while also getting us ready to welcome newcomers.

#### The Global Pandemic, Race and Politics

The tragic death tolls and uncertainty with the COVID-19 global pandemic, the national rallying response to the killing of George Floyd by a white police officer, and the riot at our nation's Capitol have placed antiracism in a more prominent place in the church. There has been a deluge of politicians, historians, sociologists, journalists, activists, clergy, and others providing analysis and programming skewed to a particular point of view. The presidential election created an unprecedented division between the Democratic Party and Republican Party. The 45th President of the United States created a climate of racial division and tensions throughout the country. Equality and justice at the hands of law enforcement and in our legal system appear non-existent for Blacks, Latinx, Asians, and

---

<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Baldwin, *Taking It to the Streets: Public Theologies of Action and Resistance*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018).

those from the Middle East, when compared to whites. Regular multiracial, multicultural worship service can be an opportunity to embody unity, a oneness with God and each other, in the larger community. Such a unified front on race and inclusion has been largely absent. Now, Emmanuel has a platform to collaborate as co-laborers as a diverse and inclusive congregation.

What I've learned up to now is that there are some at Emmanuel who are really interested and eager to transition. Many of these congregants desire to evolve and want to grow into a multiracial, multicultural church. They also desire more diversity that is inclusive of gender, sexual orientation, and class groups. The senior minister has guided many in the congregation to think more inclusively through his sermons and book club readings. The congregation has worked with a respected and skillful church consultant and has slowly implemented some of his recommendations. First, it was recommended that we read antiracism literature by Ibram X. Kendi and Michelle Alexander which we have done. Second, it was recommended that we include people of color as worship leaders. Emmanuel has done this by featuring guest worship leaders online, yet we need to have a person of color present in-person to lead service on a routine basis. Another recommendation is that Emmanuel start a gospel choir.

The senior minister has full control and decision-making authority on what happens with the worship service. So far, he has not moved Emmanuel further along based on the recommendations. It is important to face the fact that not only are there political parties in government, politics and political sides are prevalent in the church. It is my prayer that the senior minister does more to institute all of the above recommendations.

This work in the congregation and the community is God's work. This work will continue to be challenging but I do not believe that it is impossible. Transitioning a congregation's worship service where there is some resistance to change is hard work. My hope and faith informs me that I will be able to use my knowledge, experience as a diversity studies instructor, and my skills as a pastor to help with this work. I will use the blessing of the human capital I've gained through relationships with key leaders in the congregation and community to help us with these transitions. Philippians 4:13 states, "I can do all things through him/her (God) who gives me strength." Believing that God has called me to this task to help form a beloved community on earth at Emmanuel is my mandate.

To help create and nurture a beloved community, to model love in the public square will require a commitment, faith, and an appeal to the insight and compassion from those in my ministry context for this work to be successful. The challenge to do this work will be turned to joy as we celebrate a multiracial multicultural worship service as a congregation and as collaborators in the community.

#### Community Peace and Justice Network (CPJN)

In the Scriptures, Jesus is the host of his own community peace and justice network. Mark chapter 4 is one illustration that depicts Jesus, accompanied by his disciples teaching in public. We know that his public sphere was wherever he and his disciples went. He spent ample time teaching the crowds who often followed him, sometimes doing so while standing in a boat. With the disciples as collaborators, he organized and taught those who were eager to learn and others who needed to be healed. Jesus, the Mediterranean

Jewish activist, and collaborator did this with help from his disciples because he knew that people outside of his immediate community had needs that required attention.

The CPNJ at Emmanuel recognized that our community needed help and organized a year-long, monthly seminar that gathers on Zoom. In light of the many racial injustices that had occurred in our country, I offered to teach an academic seminar that examines systemic racism in America. The seminar title is “Race Together: Learnings about Race and Racism in America.” The CPJN used its email distribution list and invited people to register and bring others along and they did. Registered participants also meet in small groups on Zoom led by a facilitator who are community collaborators for this work. Some facilitators are CPJN steering committee members.

In the small groups, participants contribute responses to questions and scenarios that I provide. In addition, I and my co-host record and release a podcast after each seminar which delves a little deeper into our monthly topics. This seminar grows continuously each month and includes participants who are local and from other parts of the country. The seminar is linked to Emmanuel’s worship service. The participants are invited to visit our multiracial, multicultural worship service in person or online. I’m usually scheduled to create the worship service and preach on the Sunday before or after each month’s seminar. We are pleased that many local community participants have attended our worship service in the sanctuary and online. This public square collaboration is evolving and may prove to be promising as Emmanuel moves ahead with this work.

Besides the changes that are being made to the worship service, antiracism activism in the congregation and the public square has already launched. This is the result of my

work with the young adult cohort, the senior minister and one of Emmanuel's elders who is also one of my leaders. Some of the young adults, who are people of color, participated in worship leadership. I stated previously that Emmanuel hosts a community ministry, the Community Peace and Justice Network. Additional partners of CPJN are listed in Appendix 5.

In her groundbreaking book, *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander states the following, "One way of understanding our current system of mass incarceration is to think of it as a birdcage with a locked door. It is a set of structural arrangements that locks a racially distinct group into a subordinate political, social, and economic position, effectively creating a second-class citizenship."<sup>22</sup>

Michelle Alexander is right. That is one of the reasons why I think the work of the CPJN seminar, "Race Together" is so important. Americans live in a state of denial when it comes to the mass incarceration of Black people, men in particular. This work is teaching many participants what some of us have known for a long time. This collaboration in the public square is the result of our multiracial multicultural worship rehearsal where we are taught to love and practice loving each other. The compassion we have for this overly incarcerated population is being confronted and efforts are underway to dismantle injustice.

#### Emmanuel's First Multiracial Multicultural Service

##### Worship Service One (WS1)

For this work, I operated from an order of service that already exists at Emmanuel. I thought that it was wise not to deviate too much from the familiar, since I was already introducing new elements, mainly people of color. The persons who provided leadership in

---

<sup>22</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, (New York: The New Press, 2010), 185.

this service were diverse in race, ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status. The texts for songs and liturgy were displayed on two large monitors at the front of the sanctuary at Emmanuel. See details for WS1 on November 29, 2020, in Appendices 1 and 3.

The Prelude was played by the church musician. The call to worship signaled the formal beginning of the customary speaking parts of the worship service. The worship service continued when the congregation was asked to join in the singing of a standard anthem/hymn, “Emmanuel, Emmanuel.” This hymn embraced the original naming by the church’s founders and it affirmed the practice of older congregants who enjoy hymns and served as a reminder of its historical and faith proclamation that “God is with us.”

The pastoral associate announced that it was Advent Sunday. At Emmanuel, this simply meant that we lit a candle weekly and read Biblical texts that prepared us for Christmas Sunday; Emmanuel isn’t very high on the liturgical scale. The pastoral associate invited members of a family to come forward to light the advent candle. Afterward, a welcome was extended by myself and it was followed by a reading in recognition and celebration of Native American Heritage Month. The congregation was then invited to participate in the Unison Reading. This was followed by a special music selection, Scripture reading and the hymn, “Have Thine Own Way Lord.”

When we reached the place in the service for the Congregational Prayer, I asked the congregation to announce aloud into the worship space the names, conditions, and circumstances that we needed to pray for and they did so. After a few moments of silence, I prayed on behalf of all who were gathered and for others who were not. The Offering followed the Community Prayer. An invitation and request were made for monetary

contributions to the ministry work of Emmanuel. Ushers served the congregation by receiving their contributions. When the ushers brought the offering plates to the front of the sanctuary of the church, those who were able to stand did so and we sang a doxology together, “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow.” The sermon for the day followed the second special music selection. Once the sermon was finished, I prayed. The congregation was asked to stand and sing another hymn, “Open My Eyes That I May See.” Once we finished singing the hymn, I extended a benediction. This was followed by an instrumental Postlude which ended the worship service.

The framing of this multiracial, multicultural, diverse, and inclusive worship service was designed to link all of the congregants at Emmanuel and celebrate all of God’s human creation. The pandemic restrictions placed some limitations on the number of people allowed into the church building as well as those who could participate in the service. The other factor was accepting the guidelines for the order of worship established by the senior minister. What’s listed below met my quest to organize and implement these two multiracial multicultural worship services at Emmanuel.

**Table 2: Emmanuel Church, Membership Demographics (2021)**

<b>Total Members: 91</b>		
<b>Age Groups</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>
Under 21 — <b>11</b> 21-64 — <b>33</b> 65 over — <b>47</b>	Female — <b>61</b> Male — <b>30</b>	White — <b>75</b> Black/ African American — <b>7</b> Latino — <b>6</b> Asian — <b>3</b>

In this first multiracial multicultural worship service, the participants represent multiracial and multicultural diversity. Here's how different persons self-identify and were seen and heard by the congregants in attendance at Emmanuel and the congregants who watched the service as it streamed live online via YouTube and Facebook. These are the worship leaders and their roles of ministry in the service.

#### WS1 Order of Service Demographic Details

The Prelude was played by a white male, middle-aged baby boomer, who is middle class. The Prelude prepared us for worship by establishing an ethos for praise and adoration to God. The Call to Worship was announced by me, an African American, male, middle-aged baby boomer, who is middle class. The call to worship was an announcement, an invitation to the congregation for us to set aside our cares and concerns and devote ourselves to worshipping God together. The worship service continued when the congregation sang the hymn, "Emmanuel, Emmanuel," God is with us.

The Advent Announcement was given by a Pastoral Associate who is white, female, Silver cohort, and middle class. This announcement informed us that Christmas would be coming soon and it was time for us to prepare our hearts and minds for the celebration that recognizes the birth of Jesus. The Lighting of the Advent Candle was lit by a white family, without any particular ethnic distinction. I know this because they told me so. The husband and father is male, and part of generation X. His wife is female, generation X, and their daughter is female, generation Z. The family is middle class. The lighting of the candle at Emmanuel signals the importance of allowing our light of love to shine during advent season so that others may know that we want to share our love with



them and God's love with them. What's also important is that the husband was at church lighting the candle with his family. He rarely attends worship service. His presence and leadership gave us joy.

I extended the welcome to the congregation and my identification is as Associate Pastor of Youth and Young Adult Programs. This less informal greeting served the purpose of expressing my love and gratitude for the presence of those in attendance and informed them that we were going to worship God together.

Another woman read the statement in recognition and celebration for the Native American Heritage Moment. She is white and Native American. She informed us that she was part Cherokee and Seminole. She is female, generation X, and upper-middle class. Like the family who lit the Advent candle, she is a member of Emmanuel who rarely attends worship service. She will do so when I preach and when I ask her to participate in the worship service. Her Native American heritage statement was important because all of us needed to hear and be reminded that our Indigenous sisters and brothers are also God's creation and that they are people who have valuable lives in our community. This reading also emphasized the importance of diversity in the service.

The Unison Reading was read by a Deacon who is Dutch American, male, elder/silver cohort, upper-middle-class. The Unison Reading is a part of the worship service rehearsal whereby we read together with our praise to God simultaneously. At this WS1, I created the following Unison Reading:

*Creator of the world, you are the potter, we are the clay, and you form us in your image. Shape our spirits by Christ's transforming power, that as one people we may live out your compassion and justice, whole and sound in the realm of your peace.*

The first special music selection was rendered by an African American male who is a recent Morehouse College graduate, Generation Z, and middle class. I recruited him and he became one of Emmanuel's guest vocalists. I invited him to sing at Emmanuel because, during my three years at the church, a person of color never provided music ministry. His song of praise, "Thank You Lord" inspired us and informed us of God's greatness and why our praise to God is important. Some congregants swayed in their seats and everyone applauded, not just for his vocal gifts, but I believe they felt the presence of God, the Creator and lover of us all.

The Scripture texts were read by a white female, elder/silver cohort, middle class. She read Isaiah 64: 1-9 and Mark 13: 24-37. She is a retired public school teacher and a member of the executive council at Emmanuel. She is a very good reader. Her announcement and diction were powerful and called our attention to the seriousness and importance of hearing God's word. I felt that the tone of her voice commanded attention and as I looked out into the congregation, I believe this unannounced demand caused everyone to listen attentively with reverence to God.

I met the responsibility of leading the congregation for our moment of silent reflection and then I prayed on behalf of us all. Afterward, I invited the congregation to share an offering. After the offering was received, we sang, "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow" which is our doxology, and then I prayed to give God thanks for what we received. The moment of silent reflection gave us an opportunity to quiet our thoughts and think about God's grace, a love that we all needed as we readied ourselves for prayer. I prayed a prayer of petition and praise. I asked God to meet our individual and community needs. I proclaimed in my prayer our love for God and trust in God as we live and hope.

The second special music selection of “How Great Thou Art” on alto saxophone was played by my high school friend, a retired African-American police officer. His rendition was displayed on the two large monitors at the front of the sanctuary. He is a middle-aged black man other than me who is affiliated with Emmanuel. Throughout my leadership meetings and interactions with other congregants, he has always been noticed and welcomed. His stylistic rendition of this familiar hymn was exuberant. In my heart, I felt God’s assurance that we could indeed count on God no matter what the circumstances.

I preached the morning message entitled, “Stay Awake.” The text for the sermon that I preached for the people of Emmanuel was Mark 13: 24-37 selected from the common lectionary and it was an attempt to inform and inspire. The poem at the beginning of the sermon for this service was an attempt to use art to state what I thought many were thinking and feeling at this time in our history. I used this poem titled “America” to introduce the sermon. Using work from the celebrated poet Langston Hughes, an African American was intentional. Hughes’ poem validates and celebrates human diversity when he states the truth that America was never great, especially for non-white people. He goes on to declare that America can be great when everyone makes it so. My hope for this sermon was to remind listeners that even in this season of electoral celebrations, it was important for all of us to remain fully aware of our responsibility as co-laborers for God.

In Mark 13: 24-37, Jesus uttered a prophecy about what will or may happen in the future. Upon the first reading of this, it seems obvious that He was describing what was going to happen after a time of suffering on earth. Because Jesus’ prophecies or parables possessed dual intentionality, He very well may have been teaching his listeners the importance of being aware of what was happening in real-time and not becoming too

focused on the end time. Jesus wanted the listeners to be aware of what was happening around them. Jesus was simply saying, stay awake. Do not fall asleep. Hear your good news. Clap. Dance. Shout. Celebrate in a way that expresses your joy. Beware. Stay alert because something is going to happen. And while you are awake, work. Do what you have to so that you're not overtaken. Keep watch. Make certain that danger does not overcome you. Stay Awake.

In other words, we must be active and do the work that is necessary to grow vibrant communities of love and trust. We must take care of what we are responsible for. My understanding that I communicated in the sermon was that the ministry of Emmanuel belonged to God and that it was our responsibility to make certain that we honor and revere God as stewards of God's ministry.

No one stood up, yelled at me, or walked out while I was preaching, although this has happened to me at Emmanuel before. Throughout the socially distanced receiving line, person after person thanked me for having the courage to preach what we needed to hear. I know that often after service people share polite comments. I believed that they were honest when they said, "Thank you Pastor Lewis for reminding me to pay attention to what's happening." (CK) I appreciate that you helped me see that I am doing the work of Jesus." (JS) We have important work to do at Emmanuel." (DW) I believe that the sermon for this service was well received.

My morning message was followed by another hymn, "Open My Eyes, That I May See." This hymn was selected with intention. My hope was that after hearing the sermon and thinking about it, we would ask God to help us to see the truth of what was happening in our country. I wanted us to ponder how we could sincerely trust in God to help us look

beyond our own political preferences so that we could become a people who serve God and others without bias.

After we finished singing, I offered the benediction which was followed by the postlude and that concluded our celebratory worship service. The benediction was a “sending out” blessing as we transitioned from the sanctuary back to our communities, hopefully with truth and empowerment from God. The pianist played the song by Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, “Wake up Everybody,” while the other guest musicians joined. The lyrics of this soul genre, calls on the listeners to do their part to make the world better. I selected this song because of the social relevance of the lyrics and the rhythmic tune. In 1975, the song peaked high on the United States Billboard charts and the recording charts abroad. I believed that the familiarity of the song would resonate with the older congregants, while its impactful lyrics and rhythm would captivate the youth.

#### Emmanuel’s Second Multiracial Multicultural Service Worship Service Two (WS2)

I had to preach on Sunday, January 10, 2021, after the Capitol Riot on January 6th as God gave me a relevant response to what many in the nation were feeling at that time. The common lectionary offered Acts 19:1-7 as one of the texts for the first Sunday after the Epiphany often referred to as the baptism of Jesus. I decided to emphasize that the Holy Spirit which Paul was inquiring about in the passage was the Holy Spirit of power that helps us. My morning message was entitled, “The Good Helper. See details for WS2 on January 10, 2021, in Appendices 2 and 4.

### WS2 Order of Service Demographic Details

The Prelude was played by a white male, middle-aged baby boomer who is middle class. The prelude prepared us for worship by establishing an ethos for praise and adoration to God. The Call to Worship was announced by me, an African American, male, middle age, baby boomer, who is middle income/class. The call to worship was an announcement, an invitation to the congregation for us to set aside our cares and concerns and devote ourselves to worshipping God together. We sang two hymns, “Emmanuel, Emmanuel,” God is with us, and “How Majestic is your Name.” Both of these were selected as songs of adoration unto God.

The Pastoral Associate, who is white, female, elder/silver cohort, and middle income/class extended the welcome. This informal greeting served the purpose of expressing love and gratitude for the presence of those in attendance and informed them that we were going to worship God together. Afterward, the Pastor Associate introduced a Generation Z cohort who is Afro-Latina who invited the Young Adult cohort to join her and others for the weekly “Sunday at 7” Young Adult Ministry gathering, and then she led the congregation in the recitation of the Unison Reading that I wrote as part of the worship service rehearsal whereby we read together with our praise to God even as we received God’s promised love to us as stated in the reading. The Unison Reading is as follows:

*Lord God, you revealed your Son in the waters of the Jordan and anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim good news to all people.*

*Sanctify us by the same Spirit, that we may proclaim the healing power of the Gospel by acts of love in your name.*

The first special music selection was played by a white male, middle-aged baby boomer who is middle class. The Pastoral Associate read the Scripture. Our second hymn was “*On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry.*” This song was both a lament and praise. We cried to God because of what happened in the nation’s capital and we cried to God, trusting God for help.

As with the first service, again I met the responsibility of leading the congregation for our moment of silent reflection, and then I prayed on behalf of us all. The moment of silent reflection gave us an opportunity to quiet our thoughts so that we could think about God’s grace, a love that we all needed as we readied ourselves for prayer. I prayed a prayer of petition and praise. I asked God to meet our individual and community needs. I proclaimed in my prayer our love for God and trust in God as we live and hope.

After the prayer, I invited the congregation to share an offering. After the offering was received, we sang our doxology, “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow.” When we finished singing, I prayed a prayer that gave God thanks for what we received.

The second special music selection was provided by a father-daughter duo. The father is white, male, middle income/class, Generation X member and daughter is a white, female, middle income/class Generation Z member. The father played the piano, and the daughter sang, “Lord I Need You” which was very appropriate since many of us were feeling as though we really needed God’s presence after the insurrection.

I preached the morning message which was followed by another hymn, “Spirit of the Living God.” After preaching about the Holy Spirit, this song asked the Holy Spirit to rest on us and to use us in God’s service. This hymn was intended for us to say to God, “I heard the preached word and now I want to live it.”

After we finished singing, I offered the benediction which was followed by the postlude and that concluded our worship service. The benediction was a “sending out” blessing as we transitioned from the sanctuary back to our communities, hopefully with the assurance that would enable us to live with the power of God despite challenging circumstances that we contend with. The male white middle-aged musician played the song, “My Tribute,” also known as “To God be the Glory.” The lyrics of this postlude which ended the service gave praise to God for all that God had done. It was an exaltation of praise to God. It was another reminder, not only to God but to us as we exclaimed God’s magnificence. We rejoiced victoriously as we ended our worship service.

In my morning message, I started out explaining that Paul was frustrated with the Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus who didn’t believe. He was bothered by the paganism and the government that supported idol worship and the greed that accompanied it. He challenged the lustful corruption of the Roman Empire in Ephesus. When speaking to the believers, Paul inquired about their baptism because he knew that water baptism demonstrated repentance. Paul knew that more was needed than water baptism. He knew that to be in a deeper relationship with God, to work on behalf of God, and to live the life of joy God wants us to live, required something more.

Paul knew that the Holy Spirit empowered the believer. In this way, the Holy Spirit is the “Good Helper” that we need. Whether or not we embraced speaking in tongues or questioned the gift of prophecy, what was certain was that an inner power from the Holy Spirit enabled us to act, be, and live in a way that provided help for others and ourselves. God wants us to be the creators and doers in a world that needs some help. We don’t have



to be dismayed or feel defeated by what happened at the Capitol. The Holy Spirit is the “Good Helper” that helps us!

I went on to say that “The Good Helper Holy Spirit” gives us peace and joy to live this life because with it we can live effectively and with meaningful purpose. As Paul states in Philippians 4: 6, 7 that states, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

“The Good Helper” in us trusts God with all that concerns us and it relies on God to give our spirit the peace it needs. When this happens, it helps to keep us grounded. We do not become overwhelmed by the chaos and confusion of a riot. Jesus remains the center of our joy. We are able to hug and love others. We can listen attentively. We can converse with clarity. We read with comprehension. We write with intention. We speak with compassion. We sing with happiness in our hearts. We seek out people we don’t know just so that we can say hello. “The Good Helper” Holy Spirit gives us this spirit. The Good Helper Holy Spirit gives us Peace and Joy to Live, even when it seems too hard. The Good Helper Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit of God within us that helps us to be more than we can be by ourselves. This is some of what I shared from my sermon. I believed then as I believe now that it is important to inform the listeners that we are not living alone because we have the power of the Holy Spirit of God to help us live, especially during difficult times.

There were poignant moments during the delivery that I wasn’t prepared for and some that had a profound impact on me and the listeners. While I was preaching, there was

an impromptu “Amen” from several congregants. The Emmanuel congregation is not a call and response community that engages with the preacher as she or he is expounding. The congregants usually sit quietly during worship and clap their hands politely when a vocalist finishes her or his song and almost never responds during the preacher’s delivery of the sermon. However, on this particular Sunday morning, there were more than a few who exclaimed “Amen” and “Yes!” I gathered from the reactions of those in the sanctuary and from the emails I received about the sermon and the overall service, the message struck a chord. Here are a few examples of the emails I received:

*Dear Pastor Lewis,*

*The Good Helper Holy Spirit! I really like that. This was very timely. I was very angry after watching what went on at the capital [sic]. I was also sad when I thought about living in a country that claims to be so great. Honestly, as a white man, I’m alright even if I don’t agree with the conservative view. I can’t imagine what it must be like for you and others who aren’t white. You have a huge task at Emmanuel trying to help us become more diverse. I want you to know that I’m with you and Emmanuel is with you. We can become more than who we are with your help and the help of “The Good Helper Holy Spirit.”*

*Lots of love and appreciation,*

*Dear Pastor Lewis,*

*I want to make sure that you’re okay. Are you okay? That sermon didn’t seem like it was easy for you to preach but, boy did you preach. I’m glad that you did because we need an uncompromised truth. I thank God for you.*

*Blessings of Holy Spirit Power for you,*

*Dear Pastor Lewis,*

*You may have heard me say amen a few times. I know that's not something we do regularly at Emmanuel, but I just had to. I agree with you. The Holy Spirit does give us power to live with more confidence and joy. I don't like what happened at the capital and it really upset me. I am so glad that you weren't afraid to deal with it. I know it's not easy but please, keep doing what God has called you to do.*

*With power and love,*

*Dear Pastor Lewis,*

*I love the Sundays when you preach. I can always count on upbeat music and more than one woman participating in the service. I thank God for sending you to us and bringing others with you.*

*Thank you,*

*Dear Pastor Lewis,*

*I'm so glad that you asked **Chris (Chismerry)** to participate in the worship service. She has a beautiful spirit and also brings some more color to this place. You know that I'm white, old and tired of not seeing more diversity. I'm praying that we keep moving in this direction. With the Holy Spirit's help I believe we will.*

*Blessings to you,*

These emails are just a few confirmations from some of the members at Emmanuel. I'm fully aware that everyone isn't going to always agree with what I have to say. I accept that as part of my journey. On this Sunday, it was encouraging to read emails and hear many of the Emmanuel congregants express their appreciation for the worship service. I didn't anticipate my own anger that was expressed when I preached this sermon. I was also surprised by the amount of physical energy I had during the preaching moment. There was a synergy of collective strength within the congregation for us to rise above hate-filled acts and a determination to work harder and smarter with the Holy Spirit power. We were rehearsing the reign of God as a multiracial multicultural congregation.

Although we were few in number in the sanctuary, it was as if every seat was filled. I believe we sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit. With the exception of speaking in tongues, this worship service was emblematic of what happened in Acts 2: 1- 4. "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." There was a freedom to worship as the congregants clapped their hands, nodded their heads, and sang with a fervor that's very rare at Emmanuel.

The Emmanuel congregants take pride in being an intellectual community and they rarely express their emotions during worship. The exuberance was collective praise. When I listened to some of the congregants express their affirming responses to the worship service during the socially distanced receiving line, I knew they had been engaged. I

recognized that we were indeed rehearsing God's reign. Making this connection with those who were gathered prompted me to think about who we are and perhaps who may become.

### Behold New Things

There are multiple considerations that I ponder when I think of the next steps for this work. I believe that this work is important and needed at Emmanuel and in the community and I intend to work with others to help make it happen. I also have to seriously think about whether or not Emmanuel will fully embrace a multiracial, multicultural worship service. If Emmanuel is going to strive to create a diverse and inclusive congregation, I think it needs to create an intentional strategy. The congregation as well as senior leadership must be thoroughly committed. The church should commit this to God and incorporate this as a central value of its mission.

We must work with a church consultant who specializes in diversity and inclusivity to hold us accountable and reach our desired goals. Now that there are people of color serving on the executive council, the process may garner the attention that it needs. Emmanuel should make a consistent effort to invite more people of color to serve on the executive council until they at least represent one-third of that decision-making body. Diversity and inclusivity should be woven into everything that Emmanuel does behind the scenes and in front of the public.

### Measures to Get There

In the public square, the level of participation is already informing us on how we're doing. The degree of collaboration work with partners thus far is an indication that there is some effectiveness in the work we're doing. Similar to the ongoing congregational

measures, the use of quantitative and qualitative surveys will still be useful. Use of in-person and electronic surveys will be employed to measure the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a multiracial, multicultural worship service within the congregation. Internal and external leadership training and evaluations for both the congregation and the public square workers/collaborators can center us on our mission, sharpen our skills, and pivot in an area if necessary. All the while, making certain that we listen and learn from objective observers and consultants. All of this feedback will aid in our understanding of whether and how a multiracial, multicultural worship service that strives to model diversity and inclusivity is impactful. My hope is that what we do through multiracial, multicultural worship rehearsal will continue to assist us with our work in the public square.

Up to now, the responses concerning this work are the emails I've listed, assurances from congregants, and the consultation committee. Other measures for this work will be ongoing as we evolve. Congregational meetings will also provide some indication about how congregants think and feel. Attendance rates are another and very important measurable outcome for this work within the church. Early questions remain to be answered and Emmanuel must be unwavering in these definitions and answers. Among them are:

- (i) What is diversity and inclusivity?
- (ii) Does Emmanuel need a multiracial, multicultural worship service? What is its goal, in terms of theology and community?
- (iii) What is racism and how is it manifested in our church culture?
- (iv) What is sexism and how is it manifested in our church culture?

Emmanuel has the chance to position itself ahead of the curve to meet the multicultural and multiracial changing demographics in the Village of Ridgewood. Continuing demographic change is inevitable. The church that answers the call for a multicultural multiracial worship experience will be pleasing to God and exemplify the beloved community as in Acts 2:44-47.

Isaiah 43:19 states, “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” I thought of Emmanuel when I read this proclamation. I see God doing something new at Emmanuel. We have already experienced the benefit of multiracial multicultural worship. The decision-making body has welcomed multiple people of color onto its executive council. The worship, the rehearsal of the reign of God has given us energy and has begun to strengthen our cords as our relationships have become deeply intimate. God is making a way for us. Our wilderness and wasteland at Emmanuel has been a history with very few people of color in leadership, the pandemic, and demands for social justice. God is giving us streams through our multiracial multicultural worship that can take us beyond where we are. I believe that our multiracial multicultural worship which is a rehearsal of the reign of God can transition us so that we become a diverse and inclusive congregation.

#### Partners and Allies

This effort cannot be successful without the help of those in our community that are outside of the church. It is important that we reach out to partners and allies to help maximize the impact of this work. Besides the faculty for the Doctor of Ministry Public Theology program, cohort colleagues are those whom I have relied on for their knowledge

and expertise. Also included in this group of partners is the Interfaith Religious Leaders of Ridgewood. This association has a very good working relationship with the village council and the police chief and I are members. On the rare occasion when we worship together, each representative has the freedom to share a prayer, reading, or blessing from their tradition.

Additionally, utilizing this relationship of interfaith religious leaders has been advantageous in the public square when there's a need to address public policy and best practices. Together we've worked with the offices of Congressman Josh Gottheimer who represents our district and New Jersey Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal. Both visited the Village of Ridgewood recently for a social justice rally and are frequent visitors to such events.

### Conclusion

I have lived in the Village of Ridgewood for 25 years. Yet when I think about my first encounter with a Black maid who sent me to the back door nearly 48 years ago, I was not able to give that experience a name. I now realize that I've been imagining a beloved community for approximately 53 years since the assassination of Dr. King. I've been dreaming about a multiracial multicultural faith community for most of my life because I believe that in the Village of Ridgewood, at Emmanuel Church and churches everywhere such a community provides us with an opportunity to rehearse the reign of God on Earth.

God's creation of all kinds can rehearse God's reign on earth together. As faith communities, we can worship, listen, learn, talk and teach what it means to be loved by God and how it is we are to love each other. This rehearsal deepens our devotion to God as



God grows within us individually and as a community. Our capacity for loving each other inside our meeting space provides us with the practice that will be needed to love others who are not among us but out there beyond our walls.

The public square beyond where we gather is where we must go, this is public theology. Our multiracial multicultural worship service is our rehearsal for the interaction that will enable us to engage with sisters and brothers who do not worship with us. Our multiracial multicultural worship teaches us how to know and love our friends in the public square. We will go into the public as collaborators who are equipped and empowered by God's love for all creation to do the work that is needed and necessary.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2010.
- Baldwin, Jennifer. *Taking It to the Streets: Public Theologies of Action and Resistance*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018.
- Barrett, Paul M. *The Good Black: A True Story of Race in America*. New York: Dutton, 1999.
- Belcher, Cornell. *A Black Man in the White House: Barack Obama and the Triggering of America's Racial-Aversion Crisis*. Healdsburg: Uptown Professional Press, 2016.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism Without Racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America, Fifth Edition*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.
- Borg, Marcus J. *Convictions: How I Learned What Matters Most*. New York: HarperOne, 2014.
- Brice, Tanya Smith. *Reconciliation Reconsidered: Advancing the National Conversation on Race in Churches of Christ*. Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2016.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.
- Cone, James H. *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992.
- Cone, James H. *God of the Oppressed*. New York: Harper San Francisco, 1975.
- Dailey, Jane. *The Age of Jim Crow*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009.
- Day, Katie, and Sebastian Kim, "Introduction, in *The Brill Companion to Public Theology*, (Massachusetts: BRILL, 2017), 2, "https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004336063\_002.
- Dorrien, Gary. *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black Social Gospel*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.
- Douglass, Kelly Brown. *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015.
- Dickerson, Debra J. *The End of Blackness*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2004.
- Dickerson, Debra J. *An American Story*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2000.

Dyson, Michael Eric. *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017.

Dyson, Michael Eric. *The Black Presidency: Barack Obama and the Politics of Race in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

Fitzgerald, David Scott, and David Cook-Martin. *Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Glaude, Eddie S., Jr. *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*. New York: Broadway Books, 2017.

Hendricks, Obery M. *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted*. New York: Doubleday, 2006.

Irving, Debby. *Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race*. Cambridge: Elephant Room Press, 2014.

Kendi, Ibram X. *How to be an Antiracist*. New York: One World, 2019.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* Boston: Beacon Press, 1968.

Levin, Jack, and Jim Nolan. *The Violence of Hate: Confronting Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Other Forms of Bigotry, Third Edition*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2011.

Lewis, Jacqueline J., and John Janka. *The Pentecost Paradigm: Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018.

Obama, Barack. *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2004.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *The History of White People*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010.

Piper, John. *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2011.

Rah, Soon-Chang. *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010.

Rose, Peter, I. *They and We: Racial and Ethnic Relations in the United States, Fifth Edition*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1997.

Sniderman, Paul M., and Thomas Piazza. *Black Pride and Black Prejudice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

United States Census Bureau QuickFacts, accessed 12/05/2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ridgewoodvillagenewjersey/PST120219>.

Washington, James M. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Harper San Francisco, 1986.

Wayne, Michael. *Imagining Black America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

West, Cornel, and Christa Buschendorf. *Black Prophetic Power*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2014.

West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

Wright, Kai. *The African American Experience: Black History and Culture Through Speeches, Letters, Editorials, Poems, Songs, and Stories*. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2009.

West, Traci C. *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

## Appendix 1

## Emmanuel Worship Guide 11/29/20 (WS1)

## Sunday Service

## Prelude

Call to Worship	Pastor Lewis
Advent Statement	Pastor Wheeler
The Lighting of the Advent Candle	Ehman Osborne Family
Hymn	<i>Emmanuel, Emmanuel</i>
Welcome	Pastor Lewis
Native American Heritage Moment	Anita Powell-Byrd
Unison Reading	Deacon Sjaardema

*Creator of the world, you are the potter, we are the clay, and you form us in your image.  
Shape our spirits by Christ's transforming power, that as one people we may live out your  
compassion and justice, whole and sound in the realm of your peace.*

Special Music	Thank You Lord	Nigel Lassiter
Scripture Reading	Isaiah 64: 1-9	Carol Krzemenski

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would  
quake at your presence-as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil--

to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

**Mark 13: 24-37**

"But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

Hymn

*Have Thine Own Way Lord*

The Prayers of the People

Pastor Lewis

Moments of Silent Reflection

Congregational Prayer/The Lord's Prayer: (Using Debts & Debtors)

Our Mother and Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

The Receiving of Tithes & Offering

The Offertory

Deacon Sjaardema





## Appendix 2

## Emmanuel Worship Guide for 1/10/2021 (WS2)

## Sunday Service

Prelude

Call to Worship Pastor Lewis

\*Hymn #140 "Emmanuel, Emmanuel"

#61 "How Majestic Is Your Name"

Welcome/Announcements Pastor Wheeler

Young Adult Ministry Invitation Chrismery Reynoso

Unison Reading Chrismery Reynoso

*Lord God, you revealed your Son in the waters of the Jordan and anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim good news to all people. Sanctify us by the same Spirit, that we may proclaim the healing power of the Gospel by acts of love in your name.*

Special Music Home by another Way George Glock

Scripture Reading Genesis 1:1-5 Pastor Wheeler

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

**Acts 19:1-7**

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism” they replied. Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

\*Hymn #136

“On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry”

The Prayers of the People

Pastor Lewis

Moments of Silent Reflection

The Lord’s Prayer: (Using Debts & Debtors)

Our Mother and Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

The Receiving of Tithes & Offering

Deacon Sjaardema

The Offertory

\*The Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise God, all creatures here below; Praise God

with all the hosts above; Praise God in wonder, joy, and love. Amen.

Special Music                                      Lord I Need You      Leah and Tom Hamer

Morning Message                                “The Good Helper”    Pastor Lewis

Hymn #297                                        “Spirit of the Living God”

Benediction Pastor Lewis

Postlude    My Tribute

Musicians: George Glock, Leah and Tom Hammer (video)

## Appendix 3

## WS1 Content and Message

**Emmanuel Church, Ridgewood, NJ**  
**Rev. Arturo Pierre Lewis, M.Div., Th.M.**

**November 29, 2020**

**Stay Awake**

Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13: 24-37

**Proposition**

**Let America Be America Again, Langston Hughes**

Let America be America again.  
 Let it be the dream it used to be.  
 Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
 Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—  
 Let it be that great strong land of love  
 Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
 That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty  
 Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
 But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
 Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,  
 Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?  
 And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,  
 I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.  
 I am the red man driven from the land,  
 I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—  
 And finding only the same old stupid plan  
 Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,  
 Tangled in that ancient endless chain  
 Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!  
 Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!  
 Of work the men! Of take the pay!  
 Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.  
 I am the worker sold to the machine.  
 I am the Negro, servant to you all.  
 I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—  
 Hungry yet today despite the dream.  
 Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!  
 I am the man who never got ahead,  
 The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream  
 In the Old World while still a serf of kings,  
 Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,  
 That even yet its mighty daring sings  
 In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned  
 That's made America the land it has become.  
 O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas  
 In search of what I meant to be my home—  
 For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,  
 And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,  
 And torn from Black Africa's strand I came  
 To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?  
 Surely not me? The millions on relief today?  
 The millions shot down when we strike?  
 The millions who have nothing for our pay?

For all the dreams we've dreamed  
 And all the songs we've sung  
 And all the hopes we've held  
 And all the flags we've hung,  
 The millions who have nothing for our pay—  
 Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—  
 The land that never has been yet—  
 And yet must be—the land where every man is free.  
 The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—  
 Who made America,  
 Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,  
 Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,  
 Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—  
 The steel of freedom does not stain.  
 From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,  
 We must take back our land again,  
 America!

O, yes,  
 I say it plain,  
 America never was America to me,  
 And yet I swear this oath—  
 America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,  
 The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,  
 We, the people, must redeem  
 The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
 The mountains and the endless plain—  
 All, all the stretch of these great green states—  
 And make America again!

### **Langston Hughes, 1935**

In an interview with the theologian and professor emeritus Walter Bruggemann, Krista Tippett asks him to talk about prophetic imagination. Bruggemann said that the prophets of the Bible were rooted in their traditions and were without pedigree. He goes on to say that

“They embody tradition and imagination, gifted by their insight.” Bruggemann stated that Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Biblical poet. When I heard this, my ears perked since King’s prophetic lyrical writings and sermons have always captured me.

I have a very personal connection to the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.; King was murdered the same day as my mother’s birthday. I remember our family hearing the news as we were decorating our house, getting ready for my mother’s birthday party. The ethos of our home swayed dramatically from merriment to shock and sorrow. Because of him, I’ve been drawn to imagine a country and a world that is diverse and inclusive. I wonder if this prophetic imagination was sparked by what happened on that day.

### **Thesis**

Jesus had a prophetic imagination. Jesus isn’t thought of often as a prophet like Isaiah. Isaiah describes God’s anger with God’s people in Isaiah 64:1-9 and he reminds God that we are God’s creation, we are God’s people. Jesus too is a prophet as is evidenced quite often in the parables he told. In the New Testament text that was read earlier, Mark 13: 24-37, Jesus is forecasting or prophesying about what will happen or may happen in the future. Upon a first reading of this, it seems pretty obvious that he’s describing what’s going to happen after a time of suffering on earth. Because Jesus’ prophecies or parables possessed dual intentionality, he very well may be teaching his listeners the importance of being aware of what’s happening in real-time and not becoming too focused on the end time. This telling certainly has eschatological tones as he describes a very imaginative, supernatural experience. However, it is when he gets near the end of this story that he says- 13:33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

13:34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in

charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

13:35 Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,

13:36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.

13:37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

Jesus is simply saying, stay awake. Do not fall asleep. Hear your good news. Clap. Dance. Shout. Celebrate in the way that expresses your joy. Beware. Stay alert because something is going to happen. And while you are awake, work. Do what you have to so that you're not overtaken. Keep watch. Make certain that danger does not overcome you. Stay Awake. These instructions from the prophet Jesus can sound like a happy heads-up, just pay attention to the kind of message that can leave one feeling good and forgetting to remain diligent. Be happy but pay attention.

### **Antithesis**

What the outgoing President and his administration have done to people on the other side, those who did not vote for him is nothing short of traumatic.

Immigration policies and practices that included separating children from their parents and making it difficult for immigrants of color to enter the country is traumatic.

Stoking the flames of Racism by refusing to denounce hate groups while falsely accusing Black Lives Matter for being a terrorist organization, is traumatic.

Disrespecting and bullying women is traumatic.

Ignoring the erosion to the climate is traumatic.

Dismissing science and failing to take the coronavirus more seriously, is traumatic.



Establishing a politically conservative supreme court and federal courts is traumatic.

Even now, claiming election fraud and therefore knowingly creating an environment that will make it difficult for the incoming administration, for some, this too is traumatic.

So, we have to understand that there are some on the other, other side who are trying to experience just a little relief. You saw the celebrations in the streets a few weeks ago. Some of you may have had your own socially distanced party.

These people are happy, hopeful, and optimistic.

Rejoice!

Do not live as though you are ashamed.

Do not mute your voices.

Do not apologize.

Be proud.

Be happy.

Raise your voice!

Speak truth to power!

Stay Awake!

There are people who still believe in the ideals of this country and they want to believe more deeply.

It's amazing how some have been able to still sing that song: My Soul looks back and wonders how I got over.

Jesus says, Stay Awake!

### **Question**

What must I do while I'm awake?

## **Synthesis**

### **Stay Awake and Beware**

Be cautious and be careful. Be on the alert for dangers. Beware. Beware of those voices, those people who talk a good talk but don't walk a good walk. Beware of those who come alongside and begin to tell you how terrible your life is and why others are trying to take your jobs and terrorize your community. Beware of hucksters and hustlers who give the impression that they care when what they really care about is themselves and others like themselves. Beware of false narratives and false prophets. Beware of any proclamation of truth that excludes the least powerful.

Jesus Stay Awake and Beware.

### **Stay Awake and Work**

My colleague, Boricua, Puerto Rican sister and friend, The Rev. Lydia Munoz is right when she says, "The church has given its power away and doesn't know how to get it back." We have been given the responsibility to lead responsibly with compassion and good sense and we gave it away. We were so concerned with being viewed as holier than thou or judgmental, that we narrowed our scope to a conservative political platform and empowered liars and cheaters to lead us; shame on us.

Work while there's still time to work. Work on behalf of God. Work on behalf of the least powerful, the disconnected, who are always the most affected when there's trouble in the land. We must ground ourselves in what it means to highly value all of humanity and yes, especially the disenfranchised and collaborate with others who are willing to serve. We must work from the platform of righteousness which simply means to do right.

There are children, students not far from here who still need resources and supplies. There are special needs students who need advocates and services during this pandemic. There are mothers and fathers who are stressed and stretched with being their children's protectors and providers without losing their own self-worth by feeling defeated. Let's get to work as best we can with what we have and what we can get from others who have more. Let's get to work, all of us, every age group. Every generational cohort has something to contribute...

We will Stay Awake and take our power back.

Jesus says Stay Awake and Work.

### **Stay Awake and Watch the House**

God has given us a responsibility to take care of what God has created. This land was first occupied and utilized by Indigenous People who were displaced and murdered because the founders and colonizers determined their humanity wasn't worth much. This country's leadership murdered Indigenous People and colonized them long before the Trail of Tears. It relocated them by force to reservations where treaty after treaty after treaty was broken. So a country can and has done damage when it believed it was doing good. Life on and off of tribal land is hard and made more difficult when they experience voter suppression. Even when our Native siblings make the effort to assimilate, it still isn't good enough. They are more than good enough and are worthy of our love, respect and allegiance. By finding ways to improve their lives we Stay Awake and Watch the House. Stay awake and watch the house.

We are not a literary society as we should be. Some in our older cohorts are still reading but so many more are not. Quality reading informs us and stimulates our imaginations and

ability to think critically. Much of the information that people are reading, when they read is online misinformation and disinformation that at times is intentionally written to stir up angry emotions. Readers are being duped and don't even realize it. Those angry emotions are then set off by people with one sided agendas which lead many people to behave inappropriately because they don't have the truth. When we know the truth and act on it, we stay awake and watch the house.

Jesus says *Stay Awake and Watch the House*.

In 1895 Clara H. Scott wrote:

Open my eyes, that I may see, glimpses of truth you have for me;  
place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unlock and set me free.  
Silently now, on bended knee, ready I wait your will to see;  
open my eyes, illumine me,  
Spirit divine!

Jesus says *Stay Awake and Beware*.

Jesus says *Stay Awake and Work*.

Jesus says *Stay Awake and Watch the House*.

When we *Stay Awake*, we can be more, know more and do more. *Stay Awake*.

Amen.

## Appendix 4

## WS2 Content and Message

**Emmanuel Church, Ridgewood, NJ**  
**Rev. Arturo Pierre Lewis, M.Div., Th.M.**

**January 10, 2021**

**Acts 19:2**

He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.

**Proposition**

The departing president gave an incendiary speech which led to a riot on the day 4,000 people died in the United States due to the coronavirus on Wednesday, January 6, 2021.

His speech was an act of sedition. He used language, tone, and inflection of voice to incite his followers to rebel against the government in an attempt to overturn a legal election.

These armed insurrectionists laid siege to the Capitol building in an effort to overturn the results, it was an attack on the people’s democracy. It was the place that these right-wing storm troopers believed belonged only to them. This was Anarchy. There was a state of disorder due to the non-recognition of authority. This was a mob that carried out a riot.

They overtook the capital police, waved the confederate flag, placed pipe bombs in various locations throughout, vandalized property, and desecrated offices. Legislators, staff, and essential personnel ran for cover and many were hidden away.

“White Americans are not afraid of the cops.” This is what journalist Joy Reid and other

black and white leaders have said. It's what some of us have said. If those were Black Lives Matter protestors they never would have breached the doors to the Capitol and if they did, they most certainly would've been shot, arrested, and beaten. Besides all of the many accounts, recent history from the 2020 Summer of Protest provides evidence for this.

What took place was an act of Domestic terrorism perpetrated by white people. Five people died. Ashley Babbitt, a white woman, Airforce veteran, and an ardent supporter of the outgoing president is dead. Her life was taken because of a lie. Brian Sicknick, a Capitol police officer, an Iraq War veteran is dead. His life was taken because of a lie. Rosanne Boyland. Kevin Greeson. Benjamin Phillips. All died because of a lie. Dead because a country that needs good help doesn't have it.

I am the "Law and Order" president. Where was law and order on Wednesday, January 6, 2021? The outgoing president told his followers, "we're gonna go down to the capital." Of course, "we" meant them, not him.

It seems as though we didn't have the help that was needed a few days ago. We have not had the help we've needed the last 10 months, the past four years and, for a very long time. In times like these and all times, what we need is good help.

### **Thesis**

The Apostle Paul helped introduce Jesus to the world and what it meant to be a follower. Following John, he established the first church in Ephesus. Paul understood the importance of what was needed to be effective as a follower of the Way. He was far from being perfect like any other person but this calling and for this work, he was undeterred. Paul was frustrated with the Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus who didn't believe. He was bothered

by paganism and the government that supported idol worship and the greed that accompanied it. He challenged the lustful corruption of the Empire in Ephesus. When speaking to the believers, Paul inquired about the baptism because he knew that water baptism symbolically demonstrated repentance, the washing away of one's sins and bringing one into the family of Christ. Paul knew that more was needed than that. He knew that to be in a deeper relationship with God, to work on behalf of God and to live the life of joy God wants one to have, required something more.

John's baptism was a baptism for repentance. Jesus, the son of God, God in a human state, was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist as a demonstration that symbolized the washing away of his own sins. Even Jesus needed more. Mark 1:10 reads, "And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him." Jesus would need the spirit to do the work he was about to do.

Paul knew that the Holy Spirit, this often misunderstood, theologically and denominationally debated part of the triune God was that part that empowers the believer beyond water baptism. Whether one embraces speaking in tongues or to grapple with prophesy, what is certain is that an inner power from the Holy Spirit enables one to act, be and live in a way that provides help for others and one's self and be the creators and doers in a world that needs some help.

### **Antithesis**

Considering what has transpired especially the last four years, some wonder if anything or anyone can provide help. We've heard many say, "This is not who we are." The truth is, yes it is. It is a part of who we are. What's changed is the year and the brazenness to no

longer wear hoods when expressing white privilege and white supremacy. There's a new boldness to now spew venom out loud toward people of color and against legislators, laws and policies that doesn't satisfy the Alternative Right and its leader. Too many people, including some Christians have given this outgoing president a pass. Some have said oh, he's just all talk. He doesn't really mean what he says. I do know that before the pandemic he was good for the economy, these are his enablers.

America has enabled white supremacists and the supporters of the departing president. For the last four years and especially since November 3<sup>rd</sup>, some of us have been listening to stories about angry, conservative Americans who are really good people. Good people, even when angry and frustrated, are to act like good people. It doesn't matter if those angry conservative people are relatives, friends or church members. When we do not challenge racist views and lies, we become complicit.

The Boogaloo and Proud Boys are white domestic terrorist organizations and they should be held accountable. Hiding behind the first amendment has given Alternative Right websites such as Storm Front and Parlor a platform to spread disinformation and misinformation and they too must be held accountable.

There is a need for a good helper at a time when we consider if anything or anyone can help.

### **Question**

What can The Good Helper do in this moment where we find ourselves?

### **Synthesis**



*The Good Helper gives us Power for our Faith.*

It takes a whole lot more than just having a belief that there is a God to help us on our journey. Paul knew this when he asked the question, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” The Good Helper Holy Spirit gives us an ability to deeply believe that there are no circumstances in this life that will prevent us from believing that God is able to do what seems impossible. When The Good Helper Holy Spirit takes up residence in our spiritual consciousness then we know that we are not alone. This is when we know that our circumstances are not going to be dictated to us or determined by anyone or any empire that isn’t working for the good of all humanity. The Good Helper within us stretches our faith in such a way whereby we do not hitch our hopes in dreams to fools and schemes. We trust God to put into place very real meaningful outcomes in our space. The Good Helper within us changes the way we pray. Our prayers will not sound like “Disney World” wishes but confident petitions calling upon Jehovah Jireh, the almighty God to do what God knows how to do. The Good Helper gives us Power for our Faith to speak civilly and confidently. The tone of our conversations will be calm and cool. We won’t get rattled and intimidated by bad news or bad actors. This Good Helper Faith welcomes a new day and does not get defeated by a bad night. The Good Helper gives us Power for our Faith!

*The Good Helper gives us Abilities and Strength to Work.*

It takes a whole lot more than just having a belief that there is a God, to do the work of God. Paul knew this when he asked the question, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” The Good Helper Holy Spirit gives us the abilities and strength to

do the work that we're called to do. As a doctoral student, I attended my first Revolutionary Love Conference at Middle Collegiate Church in New York City; that's where I met and had a conversation almost two years ago with the Rev. Dr. Raphael Warnock, the newly elected senator from the state of Georgia. He said to me that being a public theologian means working on behalf of and for the good of all people. And, that his strength from within himself helps him to do this work.

The Good Helper Holy Spirit gives us Abilities and Strength to do the work of God, to do the work that people need. No matter our age, race, ethnicity, class, gender, or sexual orientation, The Good Helper can help us all to do something. Everybody's work isn't going to be the same and it doesn't have to be and it can't be because there's so much to do. Some people, especially in our older groups are learning how to use technology that they may not have ever imagined would exist. Younger people whom we were told do not know how to have face to face conversations are becoming front line activists, using their voices and their bodies to say to unjust systems that enough is enough and we want change.

When I met the now deceased Congressman John Lewis in 1997, he told me then, "Make a change in our world." He called this "Good Trouble." The Good Helper in us gives us abilities and strength to create some "Good Trouble." We don't have to do this by ourselves, especially when what we have to say and do is hard. "You can be honest when you have a congregation that not only supports you but sends you out."

That's what the Rev. Dr. William Barber said. In his most recent book, "We Are Called To Be A Movement," he also states that this is indeed our calling, it is our work to do and we must be direct and determined and not wait on others. We are called to be a movement, those who believe. (Black Lives Matter Banner and Race Together Banner) This Good

Helper Work is our work and we can do it. The Good Helper gives us Abilities and Strength to Work.

*The Good Helper gives us Peace and Joy to Live, even when it seems too hard.*

It takes a whole lot more than just having a belief that there is a God, to have peace and joy. Paul knew this when he asked the question, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” Some years ago I was invited to speak at a chapel service for the New York Giants Football Team. This was during their week off so, instead of meeting at the stadium or in a hotel conference room we met in the largest, finished basement of a home that up until then I had ever seen. When I finished speaking and after I closed in prayer, the actress Angie Harmon who was married at that time to one of the players, wanted to talk about how to be a Christian who worked publicly to help others and still have some personal peace in a maddening world. We kept trying to have this conversation despite the constant interruptions from her husband who wanted to leave. Peace and joy in this life is important and necessary for all of us even when the world appears to be on fire and we’re trying to put it out.

The Good Helper Holy Spirit gives us Peace and Joy to live this life because without it we can live effectively and with meaningful purpose. Paul wrote in Philippians 4: 6, 7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. The Good Helper in us trusts God with all that concerns us and relies on God to give our conscious spirit the peace it needs. When we do this, it helps us to keep us grounded. We do not become

overwhelmed by the chaos and confusion. Jesus remains the center of our joy. We are able to hug and love others. We can listen attentively. We can converse with clarity. We read with comprehension. We write with passion. We sing with happiness in our hearts. We seek out people we don't know just so that we can say hello. The Good Helper Spirit gives us this spirit. The Good Helper gives us Peace and Joy to Live, even when it seems too hard.

### **Conclusion**

The Good Helper is the Holy Spirit within us to be more than we can be by ourselves.

The Good Helper is us.

*The Good Helper gives us Power for our Faith...*

*The Good Helper gives us Abilities and Strength to Work...*

*The Good Helper gives us Peace and Joy to Live, even when it seems too hard...*

Paul the organizer. Paul the teacher. Paul the mentor.

Paul the imperfect who had a commission to make certain that those who were going to guide and lead, had the help they needed. He said to young Timothy, in I Timothy 1:6 and 7, "Stir up the gift of God in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, and of love and of a sound mind."

This is what we have, The Good Helper.

This is who we are, The Good Helper. **Amen.**

## Appendix 5

### Emmanuel Affiliations

Emmanuel is affiliated with the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey, American Baptist Churches USA, Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, Bautistas por la paz, Interfaith Religious Leaders of Ridgewood, International Council of Community Churches, Progressive Christianity.org, and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Committee of Ridgewood and Glen Rock.