

Humphries: Racial reconciliation a lifelong journey

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Christians who want to become bridge builders between races must embark on a lifelong journey toward reconciliation, ministry educator Mariah Humphries told participants in a [Texas Baptist Women in Ministry](#) webinar.

“You don’t get to graduate at the end of the study. You don’t get to graduate at the end of a hard conversation with a friend,” Humphries told the [webinar](#), offered in cooperation with the [Truett Church Network](#), a ministry of Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary.

Acknowledge lived experience



Mariah Humphries, ministry educator with Be the Bridge, leads a webinar on racial reconciliation, sponsored by Texas Baptist Women in Ministry in cooperation with the Truett Church Network. (Screen

Capture)

Humphries, a Native American, works with [Be the Bridge](#)—a movement to encourage racial healing, equity and reconciliation. She encouraged white American Christians to recognize the validity of the lived experience of BIPOC—Black and Indigenous People of Color.

“BIPOC know what we are talking about when it comes to racism, because we have lived it,” she said. “We live with racism on a daily basis.”

However, not all have identical shared experience and should not be viewed as a monolith, she stressed. For example, some indigenous Americans do not object to sports teams using Native American mascots, but that is a minority opinion within that community, she said.

“You will always find a few who have completely different thoughts and experiences than the majority in their own community,” Humphries said. “Not everyone is going to agree within a BIPOC space. You’ll always find some voices that believe differently.”

Not a comfortable conversation

Recognizing the reality of racism can be an uncomfortable experience, but it’s important for individuals in the majority culture to “sit in the discomfort” and reflect on it rather than simply react to it, she said.

“The emotion of discomfort is strong for many Christians in the church,” she said. “For too many, it is stronger than the act of lamenting over racism toward our BIPOC sisters and brothers in Christ.”

Be the Bridge rejects the term “white fragility” because it creates a barrier that hinders dialogue. However, Humphries encouraged webinar participants to recognize the reality of a white racialized

response—“discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a white person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice.”

Racial reconciliation is a biblical imperative, not an option Christians are free to accept or reject, she emphasized.

‘Stay with us’

Even so, when some pastors tackled race as a sermon topic in 2020 for the first time, many were shut down by members who felt uncomfortable and told ministers to “just preach the gospel,” she said.

However, when the church remains silent on the issue of race, people look elsewhere for answers, such as social media or political leaders, and that just fosters further division, she observed.

“The mindset of most is if we don’t talk about it, then it doesn’t exist,” Humphries said. However, while white American Christians have the option to walk away from an uncomfortable conversation about race, “BIPOC do not have the option to walk away from racism,” she asserted.

“We need you to stay in this conversation,” she said. “We don’t get to walk away. You get to. We need you to stay with us.”

Concerned enough to dismantle racism

White Christians tend to see racism strictly as an individual issue, but BIPOC view it in systemic and institutional terms, she noted.

While increasing numbers of majority-white churches are welcoming of BIPOC as individuals, they are not necessarily accepting of their culture, first language and lived experiences, Humphries said.

“When we accept BIPOC into the church, she should be accepting all of them,” she said.

Rather than expecting non-whites to assimilate into the majority culture or diminishing race-based differences, majority Christians should seek to learn from the lived experience of non-white brothers and sisters, she asserted. And that involves uncomfortable conversations.

“Do we feel convicted enough to denounce racism but not concerned enough to become involved in the action of dismantling it—in our life and in the life of the church?” she asked.

Mariah Humphries is a member of Park Lake Drive Baptist Church in Waco, where her husband is senior pastor. She holds a master’s degree from Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary and serves on the Baptist Standard board of directors.