

Dear Editor,

Kudos to Carole Pinkett for not pussyfooting around the topic of race within the church. We've all heard the axiom that the most racist hour in America is the time spent in church on Sunday morning. Several years ago, the late Walter Cronkite attended our church and remarked upon seeing all the colors, hearing the lilting accents of immigrants, and experiencing the different "flavors" of our parishioners during the passing of the peace that he remarked "So this is what heaven must be like!"

Most churches are one color, one language and one "flavor" and I imagine it is a comfortable feeling being around people just like you, just as it is uncomfortable being around people with whom you may not have an affinity. I can recount getting non-verbal signals of discomfort and rejection whenever I visited all or mostly white Episcopal churches. While I was moved to relate this unpleasant experience to my Black family and friends, I doubt that my visit was talked about much among the members of the church that I visited. My visit could have been an impetus for conversations about welcoming people of other races and other experiences at the church, but I doubt that this happened. What disturbs me most is that there was probably not even a mention of me after I left, or a question by anyone about why I didn't return. It was more comfortable for them without me there.

While I do not agree with Ms. Pinkett's suggestion that "racism is a religion" I believe we can and should discuss race within the confines of religion. There may be those who will read Ms. Pinkett's article and challenge the existence of discrimination, racial prejudice and intolerance in our churches. Some may challenge the need to do something about racism even if they believe it exists. They are both wrong. We must engage one another in productive, considerate, and meaningful discussions about race. I applaud those congregations who have already begun to share with and learn from one another through planned discussions such as those offered by the Union of Black Episcopalians in Texas on "One Human Race." I know that I caused discomfort when I visited a white church. Through meaningful and considerate dialog we can effectively begin to decrease the discomfort on both sides of the issue.

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