



Hate

Doesn't melt with the Snow

Melissa Lauber

The thing about snow is that you can depend on it to melt. The same is not true of hate. It doesn't always disappear. Two United Methodist churches in rural southern Maryland are discovering how hate can linger as they address the topic of racism.

Last winter, red and black words of hate were painted in the snow in their community. More than two hundred people gathered at Zion United Methodist Church near Lexington Park to voice their indignation. But they're not sure their collective outrage made a significant impact. Hate, said the Reverend Brian Jackson, "is trickier than that."

On February 27, 2005, police responded to complaints of racist symbols and threats spray painted on a car and in the snow on the grounds of the offices of the St. Mary's County branch of the NAACP in Hermanville, Maryland.

According to the police report, the letters KKK, the word "kills," and "[racial epithet for African Americans] will die!" were written in the snow. It was the fourth incident of such graffiti in the area. The first occurred February 16.

It was in response to the incidents that the two hun-

dred people gathered March 7 at the anti-hate rally. Police leaders vowed to take this hate crime seriously,

political leaders spoke out against the existence of hate groups, and religious leaders pledged to help foster a spirit of inclusiveness within the community's increasing diversity, while denouncing the graffiti as evil.

"It's more than simply pranks, it's evil—let's name it what it really is," said the Reverend Kenneth Walker, pastor of Lexington Park United Methodist Church.

"We need to stand in solidarity. We cannot let evil stand like this. This is a call to action for us." Amid the singing of gospel songs from the Civil Rights movement, the crowd pledged not to trivialize or forget the incident and to let it serve as a catalyst for greater understanding.

Jackson called his congregation at Zion UMC to prayer and fasting. At Good Friday services, he held a recruitment drive for the NAACP to ensure that people of faith are "at the table," to help steer community discussions. He is concerned about the silence that initially surrounded these expressions of hate. "It was as if keeping it silent kept it contained," Jackson said. "It doesn't."



Brian Jackson



Kenneth Walker

Awareness is key, said Walker, who preached about the incidents at the Easter Sunday sunrise worship that drew more than seven hundred people. "This can't get forgotten or put on the back burner," he said. Both pastors are concerned about what Jackson calls "the plantation mentality" that they say exists in some of the more rural parts of St. Mary's County.

They are also concerned that the graffiti was "a trial balloon to see if the Ku Klux Klan or some other hate group might get organized in the area," Walker said. National Statistics show 7,489 hate crimes were reported to the FBI in 2003.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, several active hate groups meet in this region including: the Imperial Klan of America in Washington, D.C., and Churchville; the World Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Sharpsburg; and three Klan organizations in West Virginia. Neo-Nazi hate groups are also active in Baltimore, Cumberland, and Edgewater, Maryland, the center reported.

"This was not just a crime against one segment of the community," Walker said. "It was a hate crime against the entire community. The church will do something."

However, after the snow melted, not a lot of organized activity took place, both pastors report. No one was apprehended by police in connection with the case, and the NAACP stopped returning many of the churches' phone calls.

Unexpected Conversations

At Zion UMC, the talk about violence and racism led people into sharing about incidents of domestic violence that seem to be occurring in surprising numbers in the community. "Both are unacceptable behaviors," Jackson said.

The church invited a speaker in to educate people about domestic violence, and Jackson finds himself doing a lot of counseling.

At Lexington Park UMC, the "subtle temptation is to forget about it," Walker

said. But awareness of the violence, of the hate crime, lingers. "We feel it on a more informal level. It has become more about individuals than an institution."

Both pastors note that hate crimes are attacks on one's very identity that are carried out because of how people look, behave, or even pray. They applaud the fact hate crimes are now being monitored and acted upon and they regret, they say, not doing more.

"Everyone wants to do something. But we're not sure what the next step is. The question is what do you do next? It's a question we all have to ask," said Jackson. "Things like this incident could happen at any time, in any rural community in the United States." □

Editor's Note: See "10 Ways to Fight Hate" at www.tolerance.org.

Melissa Lauber is on the staff of UM Connection, the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church.

While Christian leadership can take many forms, it may never take any if you don't fill out this one.

Imagine studying for your master's degree at a seminary that not only encouraged you to develop your own leadership gifts, it also gave you a tuition scholarship to do so.

Those are just two of the many potential doors you'll be opening up for qualified students when you nominate them for Garrett-Evangelical's Leadership Scholarship Awards.

For qualifications and the nomination form plus more information about all of the available scholarships, call 800.736.4627 or visit www.garrett.edu and follow the link on our homepage.

Garrett-Evangelical
Theological Seminary
Garrett

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
"Leadership Scholarship Awards" Nomination Form

Nominee's Information

Name of Nominee _____ Home Phone (_____) _____

E-Mail Address _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Address _____

City _____ Work Phone (_____) _____

Mobile Phone (_____) _____

Degree sought at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary _____

Academic Background

In chronological order, list all universities, colleges, and graduate schools you have attended, regardless of status or completion. Indicate degrees earned (or expect to earn) and your cumulative grade point average.

Name of Institution	Degree Earned Is Major	Grade Point Average

2121 Sheridan Road Evanston, IL 60201 + 1.800.SEMINARY (1.800.736.4627) + www.garrett.edu