

E-News from Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia
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News from WMUV / WMUV inspires and equips women to influence the world for Christ.

"In her own words" by Valerie Carter, Executive Director/ Treasurer, WMUV

I have been privileged to be a race and class bridge builder since middle school. Growing up on eastern Long Island, I attended primarily white schools. As is common in a segregated society, kids clustered together based on race, social class, sexual preference and academic achievement levels. Well, me? I was an extroverted average student from "the other side of the tracks" in prestigious Long Island, just simply loving people, all people. Befriending recent immigrant arrivals who could not speak English was my norm. Sitting one day in the cafeteria with the Black kids from my neighborhood, another day with Italian kids--a kid named Butterafuoco among them--another day, with the kids from Puerto Rico on another day, and on yet another day, with Charles who was known as Clarissa.

I could have never imagine being employed in Virginia Baptist life at 28 years old, and remaining part of the system for the last 27 years now. I have had to navigate a southern white Christian environment while of course maintaining my proud racial and northern identity. Having served on the pastoral staff of a mega, predominately Anglo church, a young white woman once informed me, "I am glad you are here, but I will never respect you because women should not preach." Once while preaching there, an older white man walked out at sermon time! The journey among Virginia Baptists has been a blessed one nonetheless!

For me, I take none of these experiences personally, but I understand that we are the result of our upbringing and thereby society at large. Our identity in Christ calls us to a kingdom life of loving our neighbors. In high school, one of my brothers told my mom, "Tell Valerie not to speak to me in school because she hangs out with white kids." He never spoke to me in school after that day. In one of the two African American seminaries that I attended, professors scolded me for working with white Southern Baptists, the enemy. No doubt there is a history of which we need not deny but name. And surely there is our faith which calls us to erase the multifaceted lines of difference while embracing the humanity of the other as the other is created in the image of God too!

This month has brought into the open old behaviors that never really went away but were under cover in the name of religious and political correctness. In Charleston, at the Emmanuel AME Church, nine lives ended because of a hate that consumed a sick young man. In Clarendon, N.C., three women pastors received threatening letters because "A woman should not be a pastor or usurp authority over a man! That's the Bible you know?" And, as of yesterday, eight African American churches have been set on fire and authorities have given multiple reasons, but with "hate" not listed among them!

In your community, may you be challenged to be a bridge builder just like Jesus? Make friends across the divide and turn over tables if you must!