

FALL STATEWIDE GATHERING

# THE COLOR LINE: DISMANTLING RACISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Rev. Dr. Michael Blackwell

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27 9:45 AM

IMMANUEL UMC

2900 49TH ST. DES MOINES, IA



The purpose of this presentation is to explore how the matrices and structures of our racialized society manifest themselves today. The ultimate goal is to ascertain the myriad opportunities to oppose and undo racism and affirm our common humanity through deliberate sacrifice and concomitant activism. Part and parcel of this discussion is to discern the myriad ways the Church continues to coexist with and perpetuate racist systems and the means proactively and dramatically to eradicate its complicity.

Michael Blackwell was born in Philadelphia, PA, and grew up in Bridgeport and Stratford, Connecticut. During the 1960s, he was profoundly affected by the lives of Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy, and Bobby Kennedy—all of who were assassinated. He attended Wesleyan University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in government.

Subsequently, he attended the Morehouse School of Religion in Atlanta, Georgia, where he was licensed to preach at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. Next, he earned a master of divinity degree at Yale University in New Haven, where he was ordained into the Christian ministry at Immanuel Baptist Church of the Connecticut Missionary Baptist and American Baptist Conventions.

After working as an associate pastor there, youth minister at a local Episcopal church, and night supervisor at a home for mentally challenged adult women for

clinical pastoral education, Michael matriculated at Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences—earning his Ph.D., with honors and distinction, in social ethics. During this period of time, he was a summer fellow at the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard University. Dr. Blackwell has taught at Curry College, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Missouri State, and the University of Northern Iowa, where he also was director for multicultural education for twenty years before receiving emeritus status upon retiring in 2015.

Through the past thirty-five years, he has been the pastor of both Baptist and United Methodist churches. For most of his adult life, he has been a community activist and leader of nonprofit organizations serving the oppressed and marginalized. Currently, he is the pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Fort Dodge.

## ***May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem***

Book by Imani Perry. The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2018.

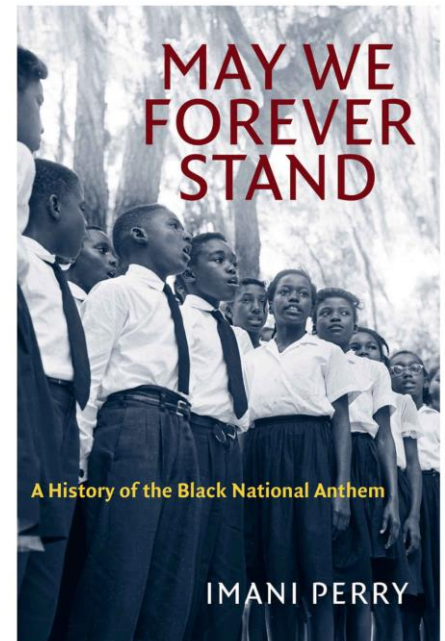
When we gather for our MFSA banquet at Annual Conference and sing “Lift Every Voice and Sing” many of us join in more lustily than we ever do singing hymns in our local congregations. Our Annual Conference singing is inspiring, but consider Dr. Imani Perry’s account of the first time it was sung in 1921: “‘Lift Every Voice and Sing’ was initially imagined as a poem to celebrate the February 12<sup>th</sup> birthday of the late President Abraham Lincoln, but on the page it became something else.” Poet James Weldon Johnson called upon his brother Rosamond to put his poem to music and have the song performed at the Lincoln’s birthday celebration by 500 school children. And so, after dedicating the song to Booker T. Washington, the children of the Stanton School were the first to sing the Black National Anthem.

Dr. Perry tells the story of the power of the anthem in the lives of black children in the south, in times of political conflict during WWII and the civil rights years. Words she uses to describe “Lift Every Voice and Sing” also fit her book: epic and wrenching.

Dr. Perry is professor of African-American studies at Princeton University. *May We Forever Stand* is published by a university press and has detailed footnotes and an extensive index but her text is filled with passion, emotion, anger --- and tears. She writes personally:

*Every Thanksgiving we travel to Birmingham, Alabama to celebrate the holiday with our extended family. Dozens of us gather in the den, huddled close together on a wraparound sofa, a few chairs, and some of us on the floor. That fall when my firstborn was in kindergarten and my baby was two years old we were grieving the loss of my grandmother. She was my family’s guiding force. Sadness lingered. Spontaneously, I asked my son to share the song he’d learned in school. He stood and began to sing. Before he’d finished the first line (of “Lift Every Voice...”) everyone in my mother’s generation stood up with him and raised their right arms with solid black power fists. His eyes widened like saucers and mine filled with tears.*

Book review  
by Rev. Bill Steward



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## **Iowa Annual Conference Resolutions**

2019 is a resolutions year again at Annual Conference. They are due December 1<sup>st</sup>. They need to be 250 words. Submissions need to be original and not be covered in an existing Iowa or General Conference resolution. You can amend an existing resolution. They must have an Iowa connection. They should address one subject matter. Statistics can be challenged for accuracy so if you use them, provide citation and use the most current and relevant stats you can find. When quoting scripture, always cite the verse and biblical translation you used.

Many topics are being worked on already: racial profiling, children's mental health care system, gun laws, bottle bill, plastic bags, Climate Change, detention and treatment of Palestinian children by the Israeli army. If you have an idea, please bless the Conference with your submission.

## Commission on a Way Forward

By Rev. Sean McRoberts, St. Mark's UMC, Iowa City

The report of the Commission on a Way Forward is now available online (<https://bit.ly/2LF02Ki>). This is the report to the General Conference that will be held in February 2019. It includes legislation for three different proposals. The proposed legislation that is endorsed by the Council of Bishops is on pages 7-33, and the full report of the Commission begins on page 131.

The plan the Bishops have endorsed, called the "One Church Plan," would remove the current denomination-wide prohibitions on same-gender weddings. It would require local churches to vote if they want to allow same-gender weddings. The One Church Plan would allow the possibility of ordination for gay and lesbian clergy candidates, while allowing annual conferences to decide whether to ban LGBTQ candidates. It would remove the current statement from our Social Principles that says, "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." It would introduce new language affirming our religious liberty and our scriptural differences of opinion.

The Commission's report includes two other plans. The "Connectional Conference Plan" would create semi-autonomous divisions of the United Methodist Church which would disagree on human sexuality but share general agencies.

**MFSA Iowa Chapter Coordinator:**

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### **MFSA Iowa Membership and Support:**

Membership includes membership with National MFSA & SQB newsletter subscription. To join, contact our membership secretary Mike Biklen. No dues are required, but any gift is greatly appreciated. 80% of your membership donation goes to fund the work of National MFSA. Please support MFSA Iowa financially through any or all of these three funds:

- **Organizer Fund:** Supports the work of our coordinator Eloise Cranke.
- **General Fund:** operating budget expenses.
- **Memorial Fund:** Gifts given /designated Donate by mailing a check to MFSA Iowa c/o Mike Biklen 515 E. 11<sup>th</sup> St., Muscatine, IA 52761-3920 or via Paypal at [mfsaiowa.org](http://mfsaiowa.org).



The "Traditional Plan" would require loyalty pledges from Bishops, impose mandatory sentencing for those who have conducted same-gender weddings, and create a new process for congregations and Annual Conferences that chose to withdraw from the United Methodist Church.

Next February, the 2019 General Conference will decide which, if any, of the plans to implement. An Alternative plan put forward by the UM Queer Clergy Caucus but not being considered by the 2019 General Conference can be read at <https://www.umqcc.org/a-simple-plan/>.

Bishop Laurie and our General Conference Delegates are visiting each district to dialogue around the pros and cons of the three plans.

Remaining dates include:

**South Central**, October 7, Knoxville, First 2:30–4

**Southwest**, October 8, Atlantic First 7:00–8:30pm

**North Central**, October 27, Webster City, Asbury 10:00–11:30am

**Northwest**, October 28, Spencer, Grace 2:30–4:00pm

**Northeast**, November 18, Cedar Falls, First Afternoon

**Central**, December 2, Ankeny First 2:00–3:30pm

Visit [mfsaiowa.org](http://mfsaiowa.org) for archives, memo, etc.

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### **MFSA Intersectional Organizing Principle:**

All experiences of marginalization and injustice are interconnected because the struggle for justice is tied to concepts of power and privilege. Intersectional organizing recognizes that injustice works on multiple and simultaneous levels. Practical intersectional organizing always focuses on collaboration and relationship building. Experiences of injustice do not happen in a vacuum; therefore, it is imperative to:

- Develop the most effective strategies to create space for understanding privilege;
- Organize in an intersectional framework led by marginalized communities;
- Build effective systems of resistance and cooperation to take action for justice