



Compassion Coalition

Ways to Connect with Racial Reconciliation with Justice

“In spite of our most noble intentions, we will never be able to reach our city's full potential together until we are willing to understand and act upon the obstacles that drive a clear racial divide in our city.”

~ LeRoy Thompson

Make a Difference Through Prayer

- Praise God for the enduring strengths and qualities of the African American community, and how these have been a blessing to all of Knoxville.
- Pray for racial reconciliation with justice in our region's leadership, institutions, economic system and culture. Pray for the healing and restoration of past injustices and hurts.
- Pray that Knoxville will be a city that offers dignity and opportunity to thrive for people of all races.
- Pray that more Christians would be moved with the desire, direction and determination to act for racial reconciliation with justice, in spite of the difficulties.
- Pray that blacks and whites in positions of influence would develop relationships with each other, sincerely seek understanding, and work together for the betterment of our whole community.
- Pray that Christians of all races in Knoxville would be truly one in Christ – sharing joys and sorrows, bearing one another's burdens, rejoicing in one another's gifts. Pray that we would find vibrant ways to worship together and work together.
- Pray that Christians would be willing to repent, to forgive, and to restore right relationships, as the Spirit leads in the process of reconciliation.
- Pray for the undoing and reversal of the practical, persistent consequences of a long history of racial discrimination and inequality. Pray that efforts to restore opportunity, dignity and hope for all would be guided by wisdom and courage.
- Praise God for the hope of a new generation that is capturing the vision for racial justice and breaking down old barriers to authentic relationships and social transformation.

Make a Difference Through Your Life

- Be aware that despite much progress, racism still exists in many forms in our communities, and that racial inequities have been embedded in the institutions and structures that shape daily life.
- Watch for stories in the News Sentinel and Metro Pulse that uncover racial tension or prejudice in our community, and take these names and faces to God in prayer. Be diligent in interceding for the peace, reconciliation and restoration of race-related woundedness in our region.
- Have a zero tolerance policy for racially degrading jokes, remarks, or media that



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condones prejudice or hatred for someone of another culture. Be prepared to explain why you don't participate in put-downs of people who are your brothers and sisters in Christ.

- Teach your children to appreciate other cultures. Expose children to the diverse cultural expressions in the Knoxville area. Make it a point to provide children with books, videos, artwork, etc. that depict people of many ethnic backgrounds.
- Seek out an opportunity to connect your family with a family of another race around a shared interest, such as sports, hiking, music, or ministry. Make plans to eat, play, or volunteer together, and allow friendships to develop.
- Become familiar with the rich history of African Americans in Knoxville and Tennessee. The Beck Cultural Center (524-8461) offers a resource for learning about the contributions of African Americans to the economic development and culture of this region.
- Ask older African American residents to share about what life was like before the civil rights era and desegregation. Caucasians often want to put this history behind them and relegate it to the past, but it is important to listen with an open mind and heart to how past (and ongoing) racial injustices have shaped the present experiences of many African Americans.
- Remind our children – and ourselves -- of the important goals that have been accomplished through civic involvement, and about our responsibility as Christians to use our power as citizens not only for the benefit of our individual family or group, but for all members of the community.
- Business, civic and church leaders: Seek out a relationship with a leader of another race in your field in order to build better understandings and personal connections. Have patience with the process -- authentic relationships take time, respectful listening, mutual sharing, and grace for the bumps in the road.

Make a Difference Through Your Church

- Conduct a cultural assessment at your church. Take stock of anything that may inadvertently reinforce racial prejudices or negative self-images (for example, the equation of "black" with "sin" in some evangelistic tools).
- Church leaders: Build a relationship with a pastor or ministry leader of another race or ethnicity. Two area leaders who are available to help you make the connection are Pastor Philip Hamilton, President of KICMA (544-1730), and Chris Martin, President of the Knoxville Leadership Foundation (524-2774). Also connect with an urban church that has made an active commitment to community ministry through the JustLead network; contact Cedric Jackson, JustLead Director of Church Development, 637-3227, or see the list of churches online at <http://www.justlead.org/network>.
- Develop a sister-church relationship with a congregation of another race or ethnicity. Share pulpit exchanges, prayer circles, fellowship meals, home visit exchanges, and



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community service projects. Bring your congregations together for shared worship experiences that honor each other's unique gifts and culture.

- When building relationships across racial, cultural and economic differences: Don't rush things or push a pre-determined agenda, but take time to develop genuine friendships. Be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19), maintain a spirit of humility (Philippians 2:1-11) and unity (Ephesians 4:3), depend on prayer and be open to wherever God leads. Be guided by God's command and deep longing to see Christ's body become truly one, and recognize that we are incomplete in experiencing and sharing God's love with our community until Jesus' prayer for unity is achieved (John 17:21-23). See the Guidelines for Kingdom Collaborations in section IV.
- Look for ways to encourage young people of color to develop their leadership and professional skills and contribute to Knoxville's future. See the chapter on children and youth for ways to get involved. Connect with African American college students through the University of Tennessee Office of Minority Student Affairs (974-6861, omsa@utk.edu) and the Pellissippi State Community College Office of Access and Diversity (539-7160, gwoods@pstcc.edu).
- See the chapter on Public Schools to learn about ways to support Project GRAD schools, which serve a higher percentage of students of color.
- Organize a team from your church to participate in the YWCA's Annual 5K Race Against Racism (523-6126, <http://www.ywca-knox.com>).

Facilitate dialogue and shared action

- Facilitate small groups that bring together people from diverse backgrounds for open, honest and respectful dialogue on racism and race relations in order to create stronger communities. (The study guide for this chapter on the Compassion Coalition website includes a resource for these discussions.)
- Questions that can be raised in these settings about race relations and opportunity in Knoxville include:
 - *Why does Knox County have one of the least diverse populations among counties with similar urban areas in Tennessee?*
 - *Why is the percentage of African Americans in Knoxville (17%) twice that of Knox County (9%)?*
 - *Why don't more African American college graduates choose to stay in Knoxville?*
 - *Why are there relatively few African American doctors, executives and other professionals in proportion to the population?*
 - *Why are the majority of African American students in schools with the highest poverty and lowest academic performance?*
 - *Why are so many of our neighborhoods segregated with whites and blacks living separate from each other?*
 - *Why is there such a discrepancy in quality of life indicators (such as health,*



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- income, and family stability) between blacks and whites in the Knoxville area?*
- *What is God's perspective on this current context? What is the value God places on cultural diversity (see Revelations 7:9)? What might God want for the relationship between the different cultures and races in our community?*
 - *What would a fully just and reconciled city and county look like? And how could we work together toward a different reality?*
- White Knoxvillians: Carefully consider and pray over the answers that come from the African American community, even (especially) if they reflect a different set of experiences and insights than your own.
 - Based on these conversations, develop teams of people who are willing to take the next step in deepening understanding and empowering change through ongoing cross-cultural dialogue, prayer, research, and relationship.
 - Develop a forum bringing together leaders of all races across city sectors and neighborhoods, to work toward a shared vision and action plans for making Knoxville a great city for all people.

Make a Difference as a Volunteer

Connect with organizations that work toward racial reconciliation and justice:

Beck Cultural Exchange Center: 524-8461, <http://www.beckcenter.net>

A tourist attraction in the greater Knoxville area that brings our community together in a culturally relevant way. Researches, collects, preserves, and exhibits African American achievements and culture.

- Help with the clipping and compilation of obituaries and biographical information for people doing genealogical studies and researching family history.
- Conduct a tour or compile information packets to be distributed during tours.
- Answer the phone, shelve books in the library, or file artifacts.
- Groups: Organize large amounts of information in the artists' and residents' room.

The African American Task Force Coalition of East TN: aatfc_etn@yahoo.com,
<http://www.aatfc.org>

Links African American communities in East Tennessee for mutual support and strength. Promotes community economic development, health and financial education, undoing racism, and preserving African American culture and heritage.

Community Economic Development Network of East TN: 933-9325, <http://cednet.us>

A network of organizations based in low and moderate-income communities that promotes racial, economic, and social justice and develops effective strategies for addressing community issues. The Dismantling Racism Committee offers workshops,

Ways to Connect: An excerpt from Compassion Coalition's 3rd edition of the Salt & Light Guidebook



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events and leadership training; fosters better understanding and more just relationships among African Americans, Latinos and Anglos; and is working to develop a dismantling racism curriculum to be used in public schools.

Knoxville Area Urban League: 524-5511, <http://www.thekaul.com>

An affiliate of the National Urban League, the nation's oldest and largest community-based movement devoted to empowering African Americans and other underserved individuals to enter the economic and social mainstream. Welcomes volunteers to mentor program participants or to assist with workforce computer classes and job readiness classes.

Legal Aid of East Tennessee: 637-0484, <http://www.laet.org>

A publicly funded, nonprofit law firm that gives free legal advice to people who cannot afford to pay for a lawyer for certain kinds of civil cases. Ensures equal justice for low-income, abused, and elderly people by providing a broad scope of legal assistance and advocacy.

Race Relations Center: 522-3004, <http://www.racerelationscenter.org>

Works to eliminate individual, institutional, and structural racism through aggressive, proactive strategies that encourage a strong sense of racial and social harmony in our communities.

Serving Knoxville as One (Operation Inasmuch, Inc.): 765-1971,

<http://www.serveasone.com>

Brings local churches of all sizes, denominations, and races together in one-day, hands-on service blitzes throughout the greater Knoxville area as a tangible demonstration of God's love.

UUNIK Academy: 414-4478, <http://www.uunik-academy.org>

A rites of passage program committed to the holistic development of African-American males ages 11-14. Helps youth become self-disciplined and responsible while battling for their hearts, minds, and spirits. Provides life, cultural, and academic skills for each student through weekly activities and programs.

YWCA: 523-6126, <http://www.ywcaknox.com>

Creates opportunities for women's growth, leadership, and power in order to attain a common vision: peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people. Works to empower women and girls and to eliminate racism in Knoxville.

How to Learn More

- To learn more about African American history and culture in Knoxville, tour the Beck



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Cultural Center (524-8461, 1927 Dandridge Avenue).

- Read Robert Booker, *Two Hundred Years of Black Culture in Knoxville Tennessee, 1791 to 1991* (The Donning Company Publishers, 1993). Dr. Booker also offers insights on African American history and contemporary issues in his regular column in the *News Sentinel* (<http://www.knoxnews.com>).
- For a list of African American churches in Knoxville, visit the Compassion Coalition website.