



Ervin Milton
Minister and Team Leader

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703

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I Have Seen Change Come, But I Expect To See More

Ervin Milton

I am a Black (some prefer African American), southern man who will be sixty-two years old soon. I remember when a McDonald's hamburger was fifteen cents in Greensboro, North Carolina. This was the hamburger that is now about one dollar. In those days, a cheeseburger was eighteen cents, fries were fifteen cents, and a drink was fifteen cents. However, they would not sell one to me because of the color of my skin. While Blacks in other parts of the USA could say that it was not like that where they lived, it is clear that discrimination was real wherever Blacks lived.

The International Civil Rights Museum in Greensboro was recently opened to commemorate the 1960 sit-ins at the Woolworth Department store luncheon counter. Before then, many places had "for white only" signs posted, which meant that Blacks could not enter or be served. The Woolworth movement sparked the change in how Black people were treated in eating establishments and other places of business across the country. I have seen that change. I can purchase a hamburger almost anywhere I choose, if I have the money.

However, after fifty years, the color of my skin still matters. It is not as obvious, but it is still a reality. I do not want people to tell me that they do not see color. To say that makes me feel that one does not see me as God has made me. However, I continue to work and pray for a society that will some day come to appreciate every person as a gift from God. As we end this time of celebrating the history, accomplishments and the struggle of Black people, I invite all of us to work for justice and equality of all people, regardless of their race, color of their skin, sexual orientation, or nationality.

One of the ways to do this is to continue to engage in conversations on race. Talk with people of your own race as well as those of other races. Tell them your story and listen to their stories. The more we talk with others and hear their stories, the better we come to understand and connect with them. This

can be done with two people or a small group. It can be done over a meal, a beverage or over several hours or days. It can be done in your home, at church, at school, at work or in a retreat setting. Notice that I used conversation as a plural word. One cannot assume that a conversation will do it. This must become a life long experience. Just as I cannot speak for all Black People (ex: Black People, African American, bi-racial, the other, and the list goes on) no one can speak for all people in their race. Our experience is our own, to some extent.

We must seek change at every level and in each race, culture, and/or subculture. If you need assistance and/or resources to help you move forward on this matter, you may contact Reverend Karen Georgia Thompson (thompsonk@ucc.org, 216.736.3719) at Justice and Witness Ministries. She can help you with resources that can get you moving. Let's change attitudes by changing our own first.

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