

# PULPIT EXCHANGES PAST AND PRESENT: PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

© 2016 Trip Reynolds

*Do you practice what you preach? Do you?*

I enjoyed reading the article, "Focusing less on race, more on love" in the current winter issue (November 17, 2015) of the Great Plains Connect, which summarized the pulpit exchange of Pastors Junius Dotson of Wichita's St. Mark and Kent Rogers of First United Methodist Church. Both clergy are lead pastors of two of Wichita's largest congregations; one congregation Black, and the other White. These two senior pastors at primarily segregated Methodist churches "swapped" pulpits for a six-week sermon series titled "Love. Period."

Reading the GP Connect article prompted me to think about my first-hand experience as a participant in the "original" Black vs. White pulpit swap back in 1965! We actually exchanged pulpits, houses, and cities!

As pictured at-right in the article from the Wichita Beacon newspaper, that swap involved my father, Rev. Dr. Everett S. Reynolds, who served St. Mark Methodist Episcopal Church from 1963 to 1973, and he did so in full-compliance with race-based Methodist doctrine and practices of the era that only allowed White pastors to pastor congregations of White people, and confined Black pastors to congregations of Black people – period. Arguably, with few exceptions, not much has changed. As demonstrated by the majority of churches throughout the U.S., by all denominations, and expressed in the 1960s by James Baldwin and Malcolm X [<https://youtu.be/a6WIM1dca18>] *the most segregated hour in America has historically and consistently been Sunday morning!*

However, in 1965, and concurrent with and in contrast to civil rights marches, beatings of Black people by police, Black people attacked by police dogs and fire hoses, riots, and the assassination of Malcolm X, nevertheless, Dr. Everett S. Reynolds *and his entire family* (wife, and three pre-teenage sons, Everett, Jr., 12, Harold, 11, and Wayne, 9) participated in a pulpit exchange with a White Methodist Episcopal pastor in Jewel, Kansas.

**For just over two weeks, the residents of Jewel, Kansas accommodated the first Black family in their town history. What was our experience?**



The Rev. Kent Rogers (left) and the Rev. Junius Dotson talk about the "Love. Period" sermon series on a Wichita-area news TV talk show. Photo courtesy Rev. Kent Rogers

Source: <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/newsdetail/focusing-less-on-race-more-on-love-2899803#sthash.5m4ZaKQ9.dpuf>



Wichita Beacon, Saturday, July 23, 1965

As my father drove into Jewel, Kansas we passed by a house where a White woman was playing in the front yard with her son who appeared to be about five or six years of age. Seeing us, the little blonde-haired boy yelled loudly to his mother, "Look mommy, a nigger man, a nigger man!!" I was immediately annoyed by this reference and said, "Dad, why does he have to call us that? We didn't do anything. Why do White people hate us so much and . . ." and my Dad interrupted me saying, "Trip, be quiet. Dry it up. That little boy didn't mean anything by that. You've got to learn when White people are really against you." I sat back down in my seat and we drove to the parsonage.

Later that same day, our mother was preparing dinner but she needed a few items. So, my father drove us down to the town's General Store, there were no supermarkets, or Walmart stores back then. As we walked into the General Store an older, 70-ish White gentlemen immediately arose from his chair, walked directly to shake my father's hand and greeted my dad saying, "Welcome! We knew a nigger man was coming to town and we're so glad to meet you!" In response, my father simply said, "We'll thank you very much, we're glad to be here!" Without any bias on my part, my father was known for being *an extremely effective communicator*, and his interpersonal skills and empathy to other people was *extraordinary*.

A few years later, when interviewed by Connie Gaston of the Wichita Eagle and Beacon Newspaper published on July 28, 1968 our mother, Shirley Reynolds, was also an *effective communicator* when she said, "My family, luckily, has a unique background. My boys grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska, where there is a small percentage of Negroes. They grew up in an integrated world. It was difficult for them to adjust to segregated situations." That's right, not until attending segregated schools in Wichita, Kansas did my brothers and I realize that White people and Black people did not live together, go to school together, etc. Our mother said, "To our family, people are just people, regardless of race or religion."



My mother was and is correct, to our family, "people are just people, regardless of race or religion."

History records and many of us recall the appalling and egregious race relations of the 1960s. Not even the recent riots in Baltimore, New York or Ferguson, Missouri compare to the blatant violence and racial injustice Black people faced during the 1960s:

- Police dogs vigorously attacked non-violent Black people who legally marched for their civil rights.
- Fire hoses were used in full-force to intentionally injure and discourage non-violent Black people who legally marched for their civil rights.
- White people openly chanted the mantra of White privilege and the greater value of segregation, and White state governors physically blocked entry to school and colleges to prevent Black students from entering White schools.

- On Sunday September 15, 1963 four pre-teenage Black girls were killed by four members of the Ku Klux Klan who planted over a dozen sticks of dynamite attached to a timing device beneath the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.
- Medgar Evers, a Field Secretary for the NAACP worked to overturn segregation, social injustice and voter rights issues, was shot in the back on June 12, 1963.

Looking back, I vividly recall watching the nightly national television news programs of the 1960s that broadcast the civil rights marches, beatings of Black people by police, Black people attacked by police dogs and fire hoses, the riots, the assassinations, etc. During the 1960s, finding support for equality and desegregation on any level was not easy.

Dr. King was disappointed that White pastors did not stand with Black leaders against racial injustice and inequality. The overwhelming majority of White ministers from all religious denominations consistently demonstrated a failure to openly support Black ministers before, during, and after the Civil Rights era. My Dad, Dr. Everett Reynolds, who served churches in Arkansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Illinois, and Kansas consistently experience a lack of support from White clergy, especially from within the Methodist Church.

There were numerous incidents throughout my Father’s sixty-one-(61) years of ministry, where he experienced a non-brotherhood version of Methodism’s so-called “connectionalism.” As accurately captured in the Academy Award ® nominated 1968 documentary, “A Time For Burning,” the clear majority of White people have very little interest or desire to “fellowship” with Black people or any people of color, which means truly accepting egalitarian principles is extremely unlikely. Albert Einstein said it so clearly, “Insanity: Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” In this regard, my father would say, “Swapping pulpits has absolutely no value when the outcome is to go back to conduct “business as usual” segregated churches, and to refuse or deny any commitment to egalitarian principles that are consistent with the Bible and the teachings of John Wesley.”  
Again . . .

*Swapping pulpits has absolutely no value when the outcome is to go back to conduct “business as usual” segregated churches, and to refuse or deny any commitment to egalitarian principles that are consistent with the Bible and the teachings of John Wesley.*

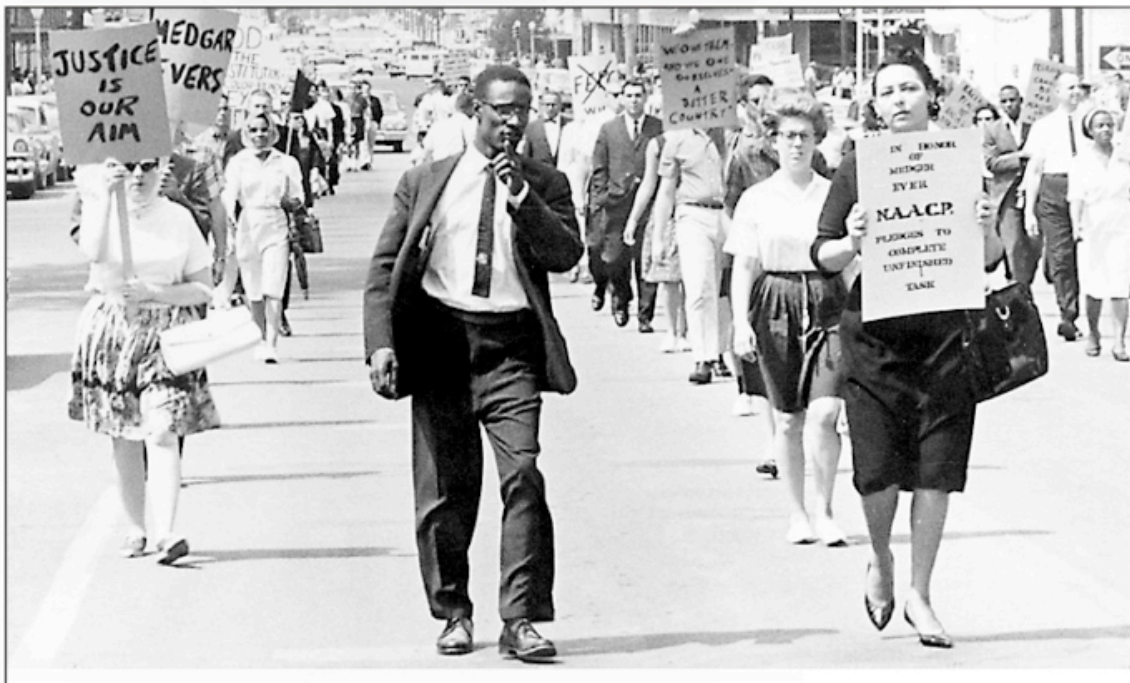


PHOTO FROM THE LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR ARCHIVES: REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

The Rev. Everett S. Reynolds (center) and Leola Bullock (right) lead marchers during a 1963 civil rights march in Lincoln, Neb.

Several movies about the Civil Rights Movement have been made typifying these atrocious events. However, reality is often more intense than any film. Unlike many so-called advocates for civil rights who never held and don't have any "skin in the game," our encounters are first-hand. For example:

- Cross-cultural appointments might be "politically fashionable" today, but when Rev. Dr. Everett Reynolds was the pastor of Newman Methodist Church in Lincoln, Nebraska (from July 1956 to July 1963), and before him when his father, Rev. Clarence C. Reynolds [District Superintendent of the St. Louis area in the 1950's] served as pastor of Newman, *Black people, including clergy, were prohibited from entering the sanctuary of Grace Methodist Church – a White Methodist church – only four blocks away.* Plus, Black people were required to enter only from the rear of the church.
- The phone-taping of Civil Rights leaders by the FBI was common in the 1960s, as was the case with the parsonage of St. Mark Methodist Episcopal Church occupied by Dr. Everett Reynolds and his family.
- My father also received numerous bomb and death threats to discourage his commitment to civil rights.

Ironically, forty-two-(42) years later, in 2005, my younger brother, Rev. Dr. Wayne M. Reynolds became senior pastor of Grace United Methodist Church in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Citizens of Wichita can recall the heated racial tension of the 60's, including rioting at area high schools, where, at sixteen-(16) years of age, I was arrested because rather than standby and do nothing as County Sheriff Vern Miller literally beat on an eighty-five-(85) pound Black girl, Trilby Peach, who did nothing but voice her First Amendment rights on September 23, 1970. I jumped on the back of Sheriff Miller to free Peach. I was later arrested and charged with a "miscreancy," which was promptly dismissed. Why? Here's an early lesson in "civil rights" my father taught us.

Of the fourteen-(14) Black male students and two-(2) Latino male students who were arrested on September 23, 1970 only one Black male student was released within approximately thirty-(30) minutes of his arrest, me, Trip Reynolds. I was in the holding cell with all of the other alleged rioters (no one White was arrested), when an officer called out my name and opened the cell door for my release. I soon met our father in the waiting area, and my Dad looked directly into my eyes and said, "Trip, you're the only one being released, and you won't be going back. All of your friends are still in jail. I got you a White attorney. Your friends have a Black attorney. *Do you understand?*" I responded, "**Yes, Dad, I get it.**" Years later, throughout my career as an human resources director, I continue to use my acquired understanding of "White privilege" to successfully report and manage AA/EEO/ADA in diverse public/private sector, profit/non-profit, union/non-union, multi-site/multi-state, and international environments, including broadcasting, aerospace, public education, financial services, health care, gaming, IT, retail, manufacturing, municipal government, property/casualty insurance, and HR Consulting. As an independent HR Consultant, I offer proprietary seminars (specifically designed for public or private sector employers) that present positive solutions to end or significantly reduce racism – solutions that are consistent with employment law, and that embrace egalitarian principles that "all lives matter." For more information, go here: <http://www.reynos.com/bio.htm#Diversity/AA/EEO>

The book, "Dissent in Wichita: The Civil Rights Movement in the Midwest, 1954-72," by Gretchen Eick, chronicled the boycotts, marches, racial injustice and numerous meetings that dealt with racism, police brutality, fair housing, unemployment, segregation, desegregation, Black Power, and many other issues addressed by the NAACP and other organizations. In a display of disapproval and punishment for his refusal to abandon his personal commitment to civil rights and equality, in 1973 the Bishop of the Kansas Conference of the Methodist Church abruptly appointed my father, Dr. Everett Reynolds, an elder in the United Methodist Church, to a *destitute appointment* as "Conference Evangelist" with no salary, no housing allowance or parsonage, and no church. **Dr. Everett Reynolds and his entire family became homeless.**

Unlike this most recent pulpit exchange between two "high profile" pastors of two large prestigious congregations, things were far more risky back in 1965. Not only risky for the pastors, but also for their young families. Pastors Everett Reynolds, Sr., and Marshall Stanton's pulpit exchange focused on race, love, hope, change and equality. They risked everything in the name of Christ and brotherly love. These two Pastors were indeed pioneers of hope, paving the way for those that followed like Dotson and Rogers. The 2012 issue of the Nebraska Messenger (Around the Conference) featured an article on Everett Reynolds, "Walking in his Father's Shoes," but completely absent was any mention of the courageous pulpit exchange with Dr. Everett Reynolds and Rev. Stanton. Long before it became "politically fashionable," both Rev. Dr. Everett S. Reynolds and his son, Rev. Dr. Wayne M.

Reynolds had uniquely pastured, preached, and ministered at dozens and dozens of interracial congregations for a combined history of nearly ninety-(90) plus years!

*Abandoned by the Methodist Church*, it was the altruism of a Baptist pastor in Wichita who opened his home to the family of Rev. Everett Reynolds for the summer of 1973; until Rev. Everett Reynolds secured the pulpit of Gorham United Methodist Church and relocated his entire family to Chicago, Illinois later that year. Out of respect to the Methodist Church and our family history, my father never spoke a single word against his denomination or its leadership. Despite the hardships endured by my father and our family, my father and five previous generations of Reynolds' ministers inspired my younger brother, Rev. Dr. Wayne M. Reynolds to continue our proud family commitment. Wayne entered the ministry in 1977 at Gorham UMC.



Regretfully, my grandfather, Rev. Clarence C. Reynolds died in his fifties, so Wayne didn't have an opportunity to spend time with him during his teens and early twenties. However, Wayne did spend many, many great hours learning from his brother, our granduncle, Rev. Abraham Lincoln Reynolds, Jr., and he was and remains a *major* influence in his life and mine.



Father and sons.



(above) Rev. Abraham Lincoln Reynolds, Jr. preaching a Sixth Grace Presbyterian Church late 1980s.

Uncle A.L. (that's what we called him), was beaten as a youth by a group of White kids for some alleged racial incident, his right ankle was broken, and it was never properly set, and never healed properly, which resulted in one leg being shorter than the other.

As the only Black mortician in a southern town, Uncle A.L. had an exclusive revenue stream that enable him to prosper, but White people took great offense to his prosperity. So, White people beat him, chased him out of town, and forced him to leave his family until he later resettled his family in Chicago. Although originally a Methodist minister, as with the thousands of Black people who found the *overt discrimination in the Methodist Church unacceptable* and eventually formed the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (C.M.E.), Uncle A.L. left the Methodist Church and joined the Presbyterian Church.

At Dr. Everett S. Reynolds funeral in 2011 at Clair Memorial UMC in Omaha, Nebraska his brother, Dr. Clarence C. Reynolds, former medical director for the state of Missouri, commented to family members:

*“We were surprised that Everett lived this long with all the bomb and death threats he’s had throughout his life. We thought we would have lost him a long time ago.”*

As reported by the Omaha World-Herald on September 16, 2002 my father, Rev. Dr. Everett S. Reynolds consistently practiced what he preached.

*“To our family, people are just people, regardless of race or religion.”*

Prior to my father, my younger brother, Dr. Wayne M. Reynolds also served as pastor for Lefler United Methodist Church, a primarily White church in south Omaha. Lefler was my father’s final church ministry prior to his death, and like all members of our family, our Dad truly loved this church and its congregation, because as he said, **“they are all simply just good folk!”**

*Again, my father would say, “Swapping pulpits has absolutely no value when the outcome is to go back to conduct ‘business as usual’ segregated churches, and to refuse or deny any commitment to egalitarian principles that are consistent with the Bible and the teachings of John Wesley.”*



Although the legacy of five generations of Methodist ministers will end when Dr. Wayne M. Reynolds retires, nevertheless, like his father, Rev. Dr. Wayne M. Reynolds will continue his commitment to egalitarian principles that are consistent with the Bible and the teaching of John Wesley. Again, as our father said throughout his ministry, **“We are all good folk, if we just practice what we preach!”**

*Rev. Dr. Wayne M. Reynolds is a fifth generation Methodist minister and currently serves the Grace United Methodist Church in Crete, Nebraska.*

*Trip Reynolds is a subject matter expert in all human resource disciplines, including four decades of public and private sector experience successfully managing and communicating AA/EEO/Diversity and Inclusion.*