

Racism is served in Texas restaurant

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**by the Rev. Heather Williams**

A silence came over the gathered body, the legislative committee on Faith and Order, Saturday, April 26, as the Rev. Darryl Barrow stood for a point of personal privilege. Barrow, a person of color and originally a member of the Methodist Church of the Caribbean, serves as the NCNY Spiritual Leadership Director.



Rev. Darryl  
Barrow

Barrow, a North Central New York (NCNY) Annual Conference delegate, spoke of an incident that had happened on Friday evening, April 25, at a local restaurant where the delegation had gathered for dinner.

Meals were brought to the table one by one -- even those who were a half hour late to dinner were served, but Barrow's meal still had not been served. Shirley Verity, a reserve lay delegate, sitting on his right side was served the same meal he had order 45 minutes earlier. The wait staff offered many reasons for the delay, but to those at the table, it was clear they were witnessing an act of racism.

Finally, Barrow's persistence brought the manager, who offered a free meal with a dismissive, "Well, it is Friday and we're busy around here."

"This is not about free food," Barrow said. "It is now a matter of justice."

Barrow shared his emotional distress with the Faith and Order Legislative Committee, moving all in the room to silence.

"I am part of a heritage of a culture of exclusion," Barrow told the group. "And this is a sin in which the church, The United Methodist Church, has participated and continues to participate.

"This is why I stand on behalf of those who are excluded and I offer no compromise," he said.

People listening laid hands on Barrow, offering prayers for all those who feel the sting of racism and for those who participate in the sin of exclusion.

Earlier, the NCNY delegation, led by Ron Bretsch, also laid hands on Barrow to show their understanding and full support. Bretsch had contacted Bishop Violet L. Fisher while the Rev. Marti Swords-Horrel spoke with Bishop Ben R. Chamness, resident bishop of Fort Worth, Texas.

Bishop Fisher conferred with General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) President Bishop Linda Lee and formed a strategy that included letters to the restaurant's corporate offices, reminding the entire General Conference that all people must be responsible for the pain of racism, because it impacts more than the intended victim.

Verity, who sat next to Barrow, despite her anger at witnessing the injustice, it was an educational moment for her. "I needed to see that [racism]," she said. "It is no longer someone else's story. It is mine as well."

*The Rev. Heather Williams is covering General Conference for the North Central New York Conference and sends this commentary on an incident which occurred Friday evening.*