

I visited a Ukrainian Church, Full Gospel Church in Garfield, NJ, and it was not as I imagined. This is a group of people that is dedicated to embracing people that come to the United States from Ukraine to escape all that is happening between Ukraine and Russia. When I visited the church, I automatically felt like an outcast, and it is not because of the way they treated me but it was an automatic response to be the only one of color in the building. When I got to the church, I met up with some people at the front door who was coming into service and they were nice and cordial (not overwhelmingly friendly) but not standoffish either. They spoke and held the door and I state this because not everyone will hold the door open for me.

When I went into the church building, I immediately felt like the minority, and I was. It had nothing to do with how they treated me and had everything to do with how I felt. I was the only person of color and whether it was verbalized or not I felt uncomfortable because of the looks and stares. This was an external feeling that was evident due to the color of my skin. In American history this has been the way things have been and a person can get used to these ways of thinking.

Internally I felt understood because we have been looked upon as being different. Please don't get me wrong, most people who are not caramel complexion or darker can't understand what it is like to be judged based on the color of their skin, but they can feel judged based on their status of entering the United States. I noticed that although their complexion is light, the Ukrainians are here because of the war that is going on between them and Russia. Although they are not bound by the same governmental condemnation, they are still in a place of coming into a country in the middle of their distressing moment and for them it could look just as scary as those of us who have lived in this all of our lives.

There were no others that I was able to identify with on my trip physically. I was the only one of color that was there and although we share the ability to be foreigners in the land, they are new who come here to escape their war and we were bought here against our will which ignited a whole new war of its own. This war is the current war of racism, and the enemy is doing everything in his power to erase a people that never asked to be uprooted. It is by deception, lies and a longing to have more that we were able to be coerced into coming into our slavery.

I noticed that although this congregation wasn't separated by color, they were separated from what they know. They were separated from their homeland, their families, and their tradition as they know it and that is similar to the plight of the black African American. We were uprooted from our home against our will and forced to be separated from our women and children. We had to grow up in a land who has oppressed us. Although the Ukrainians did not have to come into a land of oppression, they had to leave a land of oppression. They were forced out of their home because of the fight for political gain and power from one nation (Russia) against physical and political freedom from another country (Ukraine). Although the war may look different or is approached differently, the casualties are the same. They look like emotional trauma, mental stress, physical distress, and spiritual arrest.

In this setting, I have learned that reconciliation is way beyond the color of our skin. Although that plays a big part in the American version of history that is not everyone's history. To be reconciled to others is to acknowledge that you are connected to them in a unique and special way. We can't be reconciled to people who are earthly minded when we are dealing on a different level spiritually. There are times when we have to acknowledge that there are people who will not see the same way we see because of how the enemy has them wrapped up. This

experience taught me to be open to the fact that not everyone is racist nor does everyone see in color.

We are a product of what is presented to us if we think that everyone thinks the same. It is obvious that this western world runs on color, however not everyone operates in that way of thinking. On one hand I believe that not everyone treats others based on color but I also believe that there is more that can be done to support our brothers and sisters in Christ and be supported by them. A lot of us want to do more and be more effective and relevant and don't know how to because we have been conditioned by the ways of the world. If we trust in God and lean on him we can more than we ever imagined. This experience has taught me above all else to love and respect the person where they are and while I walk in Christ show them the same thing that I want.