



Suburban Chicago Church Celebrates Easter Season by “Fasting from Whiteness” and Gets Messages of Hate

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First United Church of Oak Park decided to take Jesus of Nazareth’s instruction to “Follow me” literally this Lenten season, the 40-day period preceding Easter. They announced they were “fasting from whiteness” by abstaining from performing hymns composed or written by white musicians.

Rev. John Edgerton, senior pastor, says this whole practice has been about love. The love of God and neighbor is not only “giving something up” but “taking something on.” Rev. Edgerton said, “Justice must be loved into existence. It is the only way. White people absolutely have a place in the redemption story. White people were even at the foot of the cross: they were the Roman Guards. As white people we must love our Redeemer enough to put down our spears. We must love our redeemer more than our whiteness, and kneel before our redeemer who is a dark-skinned man from the poor parts of town.”

The church also placed a “Fasting from whiteness” sign on its front lawn, proclaiming, “this Lent we lift up the voices of Black People, Indigenous People and People of Color”.

In this case, “taking something on” became living into the reality of white supremacist backlash in this country. Hateful messages started after an online piece by TurningPointUSA and other right-wing outlets criticizing this practice. Other conservative media picked it up. The church received over well over 1,000 hateful messages in under a day.

This is where actually walking the walk of love can take you in this country today. Jesus knew it, and blessed those who stood up for righteousness’ sake.

“Blessed are you when people revile and persecute you.” (Matthew 5:11)

As we approach Holy Week, this message of love in the face of hate could not be more appropriate.