

# Black church's Zoom call inspires some to go from 'not racist' to anti-racist

'I'm taking the step past not being racist to becoming anti-racist,' said a Newport Beach pastor



New Hope Presbyterian Church in Orange hosted a virtual vigil on Zoom Tuesday night to facilitate a dialogue on race relations. The vigil drew 128 participants. The church remains closed because of the coronavirus pandemic. (Photo courtesy of New Hope Presbyterian Church)

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New Hope Presbyterian Church, a black congregation in Orange, hosted a “virtual vigil” via Zoom on Tuesday night, June 9, to discuss the death of George Floyd, the 46-year-old man who died beneath the knee of a Minneapolis police officer during an arrest, which has spurred [nationwide protests](#).

The Rev. Chineta Goodjoin, the church’s pastor, her face lit by the glow of a candle, started the Zoom vigil with eight minutes and 46 seconds of silence while playing a slideshow listing the names of African Americans killed by police officers and those who died in police custody.

## **Impact of racism on lives**

The conversation, which drew 128 participants, was divided into two segments. First, African Americans talked about the impact of racism and racial violence on their lives. And in the second segment, non-African-Americans talked about what action they could take to end systemic racism.

During a poignant hour, members of the black community from as far away as South Carolina talked about the impact racism has had on their lives. Carol Nealy, who wore a T-shirt that said “Make America kind again,” said racism has shaped who she is today. Nealy said she wouldn’t put her image on her email icon because she wants recipients to read the email before they know she’s black.

“I chuckle at the privilege when I see someone dressed in shorts or flip-flops at the airport,” she said. “I always dress up when I shop or when I go to the airport. I don’t let my 5-year-old son wear a hoodie even though he likes how it feels. I feel responsible for my entire race. When a newscaster reports that someone does something terrible, I pray they are not black. Living while black — it’s real and it’s tiring.”

The Rev. Kamal Hassan said he grew up in South Los Angeles and was 8 at the time of the Watts riots, which raged for six days and resulted in 34 deaths, 1,032 injuries, 4,000 arrests and about \$40 million in property damage. The riot was spurred by an incident on Aug. 11, 1965, when Marquette Frye, a black motorist, was pulled over and arrested by Lee W. Minikus, a white California Highway Patrol officer, on suspicion of driving while intoxicated.

“I vividly remember seeing bayoneted rifle-holding National Guardsmen standing in my neighborhood,” he said. “I saw Jeeps with machine guns mounted in the back patrolling our streets.”

## **Humiliated by a police officer**

His first police encounter, Hassan said, was at age 12, when he stayed home from school pretending to be sick, but was sent out by his mother to buy groceries. He remembers the policeman cursing him out and pointing a pistol at him threatening to take his “black (expletive) to jail.”

“That left an impression for life,” Hassan said.

Shelby Brown said she grew up at the height of the civil rights movement in Virginia, where she wasn't allowed to ride in the front of the bus. She pretended not to know how to read so she could stand next to the bus driver and be told when her bus stop arrived. But, despite the limitations of those time, Brown said she always spoke up.

“But, the past few days, I've been reliving the past and I'm so hurt,” she said, speaking about the protests and riots sparked by Floyd's killing.

## **'I've lived in a bubble'**

The non-African-Americans who spoke during the vigil said listening to the stories of black people was important for them. Many said they would consciously become anti-racist instead of comfortably resting in the thought that they aren't racist.

“As a white person, I've lived in a bubble where I thought everyone was treated the same,” Stephanie Garcia said. “Now, I've buried myself in research and am trying to find people to listen to. I've gone to protest other things, but never racism, because I never thought racism was a problem. One thing I'd say to white people is close your mouth, open your ears and listen. Don't stop speaking about injustice.”

SueJeanne Koh-Parsons, who is Asian American, said she writes and thinks about “Christian theology and how it's entangled in anti-blackness.”

“I feel more clarity in how this needs to be connected to my local context, and I hope to ground my thinking in action,” she said.

People need to move beyond tolerance, “which sounds so condescending,” said the Rev. Mark Davis, senior pastor of St. Mark Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach.

“I'm taking the step past not being racist to becoming anti-racist,” he said. “I'm trying to take the steps here at home and in my work of really doing an internal audit of those lingering prejudices I learned and many I picked up all on my own. It's become my real spiritual discipline to understand what it means to be anti-racist and take that as my work.”