



## Still Strong: Westmont's Commitment to Justice, Reconciliation and Diversity

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### The Gospel Changes Everything

The gentle warmth of the Santa Barbara sun casts its dappled glow on the well-traveled path leading to the Westmont Dining Commons. As students approach the building, the prominent Westmont seal on the adjacent wall catches their attention. It displays the Latin phrase, "Christus Primatum Tenens." Christ holds first place. Westmont's motto, taken from Colossians 1:18, recognizes that the gospel touches every facet of our lives. It speaks to each academic discipline and transforms our relationships. The gospel changes everything.

Throughout the summer and the academic year, Westmont has sought to engage in the national conversation regarding issues of race and diversity from a gospel-centered perspective. The conversation in our society sometimes focuses on two stark options: ignoring or dismissing the controversy or living in despair and

bitterness. The gospel presents a third option. It requires us to confront the issue and recognize the sin of racism and its impact on our lives — and it lifts us out of despair. Westmont recognizes that if Christians fail to place the gospel at the center of how we engage with one another regarding issues related to racism, our conversations will resemble the discordant dialogue so prevalent in the world.

Edee Schulze, vice president of student life, reflects on the central role of the gospel in Westmont's diversity initiative and conversations regarding racial issues. "Human beings bear the image of God," she says. "Sin has warped this image. Christ came to redeem both individuals and societies to make a new heaven and a new earth where all people will be represented in a reconciled community with God on the throne."

Ultimately, Westmont strives to exalt Christ as preeminent and participate in his gospel of reconciliation. Christ reconciled himself to us and calls us to reconcile to one another. "We live in a process of allowing God to change us so we may represent Christ and usher in that kingdom," Schulze says.



# The Gospel and Black History Month

“In the church, we’ve often settled for a fool’s choice between the gospel and justice,” says Campus Pastor Scott Lisea. “The Campus Pastor’s Office desires to foster conversations about issues of race and diversity that place Christ at the center. As the church, we can present a vision for reconciliation that involves telling the truth and lamenting but also offers hope.”

Lisea believes chapel plays an integral role in guiding the college as it engages issues of race and diversity from the perspective of the gospel. Chapel is the only time when the entire community gathers together. He set aside February, Black History Month, to focus on Christ in and through the Black church and to further explore how the Westmont community can display Christ’s love regarding matters of racial justice.

Lisea, the only non-Black speaker during the month, collaborated with Blake Thomas, director of Intercultural Programs, and several professors to achieve a rich depth of perspectives and a variety of voices. “In our current climate, it’s essential that the church hears from brothers and sisters from different contexts and learns from their faith,” Lisea says. “The church desperately needs these voices.”

Sheila Wise Rowe, a celebrated speaker on racial reconciliation, began the series on Christ in and through the Black church. She described the ways Christ has worked in the Black church through generations of people who have served faithfully under duress. “There is incredible power in learning from those who have suffered and yet have found their victory in Christ,” Lisea says.

On February 8, chapel hosted Darryl Williamson, pastor of Living Faith Bible Fellowship in Tampa, Florida, and a member of the Leadership Council of the Gospel Coalition. He emphasized the power of the gospel in redeeming and reconciling issues of race and discrimination. “Christ’s method for dealing with marginalization is centered on, but not exclusively, an inner renewal or transformation achieved by himself,” Williamson said. “The fundamental need for those who want to do justice is a need to experience spiritual justice.”

Thomas continued this focus on the power of the gospel in addressing racial issues by discussing the gospel and restorative justice. “Restorative justice means that we have a responsibility to see others made whole rather than give people what they deserve,” he said. “God sends Jesus on the cross to take our punishment upon himself...so he can be both just and the justifier of the ungodly. That is restorative justice.”

The gospel invites us to celebrate culture and lift up our voices. “Being made alive in Christ Jesus takes us deeper into our cultural identities since God is the one who made these diverse racial identities,” said Vince Bantu, president of the Meachum School of Theology. He believes the Bible calls us to celebrate culture and ethnicity. “We are equally and uniquely made in the image of God and bring unique perspectives that the rest of the body of Christ needs,” he said.

Lisea will continue to focus chapel talks on the power of the gospel to transform society’s brokenness through justice. In March, speakers discussed seeking Christ in the social structures and the public square. “The gospel calls us to pursue both holiness and justice,” Lisea says.

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# Celebrating Black History Month in Chapel

Find links to videos of these speakers on the Westmont Chapel website.



**February 3:** Sheila Wise Rowe, executive director of Rehoboth House, an international healing and reconciliation ministry in Nahant, Massachusetts, is a Christian counselor, spiritual director, educator, writer and speaker.



**February 8, 10:** Darryl Williamson, lead pastor of Living Faith Bible Fellowship in Tampa, Florida, serves on the Leadership Council of the Gospel Coalition and has contributed to two books.



**February 12:** Blake Thomas, director of Intercultural Programs at Westmont, previously directed Bridge-Builders, a service-learning ministry of Forge for Families in Houston, Texas.



**February 19:** John Perkins is the lead pastor of Common Ground Covenant Church, a multiethnic missional church in Jackson, Mississippi, and former president and CEO of the Spencer Perkins Center and John and Vera Mae Perkins Foundation, a Christian non-profit focused on youth and community development.



**February 22:** Vince Bantu, assistant professor of church history and Black church studies at Fuller Theological Seminary’s Houston campus, also serves as a liaison to the William E. Pannell Center for African American Church Studies and directs the Meachum School of Haymanot, which provides theological education for urban pastors and leaders.



**February 24:** Michael D. Reynolds is the director of Ministerial Development for the Division of Education at the Church of God International Offices, project director of the Lilly Initiative, and a former professor and pastor.



**March 1:** Tedashii Lavoy Anderson, known simply as Tedashii, is an American Christian hip hop artist with five solo albums and a member of the hip-hop troupe 116 Clique who hosted the NGEN Radio show “Serium.”

# The Gospel and Community: Taking the Next Step

“These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” *1 Corinthians 13:13*

“Love is central to the life of the church,” Blake Thomas says. “We’re called to love our neighbors as ourselves. Often we prioritize faith and hope, but Paul says that the greatest of these is love.” As the new director for Westmont’s Intercultural Programs (ICP), Thomas firmly believes that the heart of the conversation on race and diversity centers on loving those around us well.

“This is not about intent,” Thomas says. “We may need to change our actions even though we’re acting out of the best intentions because people may not experience our actions as loving.” He explains that the call to love others well arises out of our identity as beloved children of God. “Part of loving others well is making each person aware of their dignity as an image bearer of Christ,” Thomas says. “Our primary relationship to one another in the Westmont community is that of brothers and sisters in Christ. Thus, we have an overriding obligation to love them.” Love for one another, founded on Christ’s love for us, provides the impetus for our conversations surrounding justice and reconciliation.

This gospel-centered love often demands uncomfortable change. Quoting civil rights leader John Lewis, Thomas believes that “good trouble” moves us into the kingdom of God. He points to progress in revising Westmont’s academic program. Revitalizing the ethnic studies minor has encouraged him, as has the development of new general education requirements focusing on reconciliation, diversity and justice.

Thomas has witnessed the fruit of ICP’s efforts to organize several opportunities to discuss systemic racism and social justice. In partnership with WCSA, ICP began a Zoom series, Conversations that Matter, last semester, where students examined the biblical foundations of social justice and explored the role of the church in combating racism and other societal issues. The series continued throughout the spring semester.

Thomas also cites the content and conversations facilitated by the 9th annual The Next Step workshop. ICP sponsored this virtual event that featured speakers in chapel, lectures and discussion groups throughout the week of January 18-22. The initiative sought to bring the Westmont community together and engage the question: What’s the next step for the church toward racial justice and reconciliation? The workshop invited faculty, staff and students to participate in intercultural and cross-cultural dialogue about issues of racial justice, theology, reconciliation and the liberal arts. Thomas recruited speakers who would present challenging perspectives to the community. “We don’t need to embrace or agree with everyone’s approach, but we do need to be humble and open,” he says.

During his message on freeing the church from captivity to the Western context, Soong-Chan Rah explored the issue of lament



and recognized the ways the church has fallen short in the area of racial justice. “Lament calls people to repentance,” he said. “It calls people to the understanding that we did not do right, that we need to confess corporately... We have fallen short of the glory of God.”

Vince Bantu, an assistant professor of church history and Black church studies at Fuller Theological Seminary with years of pastoral experience, spoke on “Race, Theology and the need for Gospel Haymanot.” Marcus “Goodie” Goodloe presented the “The Second Phase and the Ongoing Work of Civil Rights.” Joel Goza, a speaker, community advocate and author of “America’s Unholy Ghosts,” participated in a panel with Goodloe. During his talk, “Making an Anti-racist America,” Goza said, “We’re battling for the very soul of our nation. These issues are complex and cost something to address, but to not address these issues costs even more.”

Thomas says participants expressed appreciation for the deep and humble caliber of conversations that moved beyond basic debates to generous and scholarly dialogue about race from a theological and historical perspective. Several attendees praised Bantu’s thoughts during a panel with Westmont religious studies professors Helen Rhee and Sameer Yadav discussing race, theology and Christian education. Kya Mangrum, an English professor at Westmont, organized and participated in this panel. “Ultimately, The Next Step demonstrated that it’s possible to develop anti-racist discourse while embracing Jesus — and develop a critical framework that addresses racism within our society that centers on Christian thought and love for one another,” Mangrum says.

“The Next Step has become a ritual for the Westmont community, a yearly self-examination to consider the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.: his practices, his character and how he can inspire us in the ongoing work of racial reconciliation and justice,” says Meredith Whitnah, assistant professor of sociology. She appreciated how the speakers called attention to King’s encompassing vision and challenged the Westmont community to embrace the uncomfortable aspects of pursuing justice.

On the first day, participants chose which virtual sessions to attend, and Whitnah facilitated a workshop on critical race theory. She has played an integral role in revitalizing the ethnic studies minor at Westmont.

“Jesus constantly cared for the oppressed and downtrodden,” says Ebun Kalejaiye ’23. A political science major and co-leader of Westmont’s Black Student Union (BSU), Kalejaiye appreciated how The Next Step explored Jesus’ heart for justice through a diverse array of speakers with a variety of perspectives on race, theology and politics. “I really loved the way that Dr. Vince Bantu examined how Scripture addresses issues of racial prejudice,” she said. “My faith plays an important role in engaging issues of racial justice. Christianity does not allow complacency.”

ICP student leaders facilitated small groups throughout the week. Tiana Kruckar ’22, an Asian Student Association leader and double major in chemistry and psychology, co-led a small group with Tori Davis ’21 that encouraged students to discuss their questions and relate the content to their own experience. Kruckar appreciated The Next Step’s emphasis on understanding issues of race and justice through a Christian lens. “The gospel calls us to love people,” she says. “To do this well, we must recognize our own privilege and engage not only with our neighbors but with those who are different from us and may not have the same privileges.”

Davis, a co-leader of Westmont’s BSU, reflected on the ways The Next Step challenged her understanding of race and theology. During the past year, she reckoned with what it means to live out Christianity while engaging issues of racial justice. The opportunity to learn from brilliant theologians who were also passionate about matters of race bolstered her faith.

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## The Gospel and Reconciliation: The Arrabon Initiative and Reflections with David Bailey



“When a Christian community is on the transformational journey of becoming a reconciling community, we become a foretaste of the kingdom of God that this generation is longing for,” says David Bailey, executive director of Arrabon. He firmly believes in the powerful witness of a community dedicated to gospel-centered reconciliation. Arrabon seeks to equip institutions and communities to pursue racial justice and reconciliation in their particular context.

“A reconciling community is a group of people that acknowledges the depth of brokenness going on in our world but hears the invitation from God to be part of the healing and mending of the brokenness,” he says. “But we do this in a transformative way. From the Christian perspective, transformation works from the inside out, not the outside in.”

Westmont seeks to build this kind of reconciled community. Its two-year partnership with Arrabon began in 2020 and will continue until 2022. Ultimately, Bailey believes that this process of learning how to confront race and brokenness in society is about demonstrating the transforming power of the gospel to a world desperate for hope. This takes effort and active engagement. “Holiness is a demonstration of the grace of God in your life,” he says. “It’s not something that just happens. It requires intentionality.”

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The Arrabon Process centers on five essential community practices: understanding reconciliation as spiritual formation; increasing the community’s cultural intelligence; learning the community’s diverse shared narrative; participating in cross-cultural collaboration; and engaging in reconciling culture-making. Westmont will complete 14 steps that involve focus groups, dialogue, surveys, workshops and retreats under Arrabon’s guidance throughout the two years.

Although some goals will take longer to accomplish — such as hiring a more diverse faculty — Bailey believes it’s always possible to prepare for greater change and demonstrate Christ’s love in the here and now. “Every community has a welcome mat, which says either ‘welcome home’ or ‘welcome guest,’” he says. Arrabon strives to equip Westmont to do everything in its power to enable minority students to feel welcomed home.

The Becoming a Reconciling Community Leadership (BaRC) Team, composed of faculty, staff and administrators, works with Arrabon to transform Westmont into a reconciling community. Members include: Gayle D. Beebe, president; Edee Schulze, vice president for student life; Blake Thomas, director of Intercultural Programs; Scott Lisea, campus pastor; Ogechi Nwaokemele, assistant professor of kinesiology; Dinora Cardoso, professor of Spanish; Enrico Manlapig, associate professor of economics and business; and Bailey.

Schulze praises Arrabon’s work and appreciates the privilege of listening to and learning from Bailey. “It’s not just about what we are doing, but how we are being,” she says. “Westmont’s attention to these issues goes beyond creating a lot of activities; it involves changing how we relate to others. It’s about individual transformation and taking responsibility for communal transformation.”

“Arrabon has enabled us to see the realities we must confront and has discovered that our community is invested in growth and poised for change,” Lisea says.

As Westmont enters its second year of the Arrabon Initiative, Bailey reflects on the progress made. He’s encouraged by how the college has enthusiastically embraced the vision of a reconciling community. He has witnessed the deep commitment to growth and firmly believes in the college’s potential.

Arrabon seeks to transform every level of an institution: administrators, staff, faculty, student leaders, students, parents and alums. Typically, this process involves conflict, as people may have different visions of a reconciling community. “These messy moments provide us with opportunities to glorify God,” Bailey says. “It is not about you and me or whether God is on our side. It is about whether we’re on God’s side.”



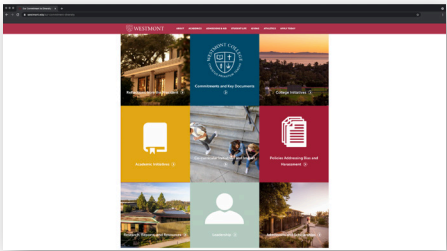
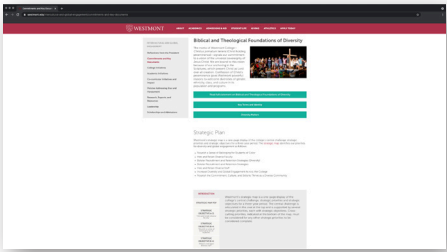


# The Gospel in Action: Micah 6:8

The prophet Micah said to the people of Judah, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Westmont has formulated its strategic diversity plan around this call. In Christ, we’re perfectly and completely loved and forgiven. The gospel enables us to walk in his power and serve those around us.



The Micah page of the Westmont website (westmont.edu/our-commitment-diversity) outlines the college’s diversity plan and provides a variety of resources, initiatives and statistics. Westmont’s strategic plan specifically incorporates intercultural and global engagement. “More than anything, we want to walk together with hope and honor Christ,” says President Gayle D. Beebe on the site. “We’re committed to being a repentant people, one in spirit and purpose, as we advance the kingdom of God through the work of the college.”



Key documents on the website include a historical reflection on the purpose and mission of the college, the biblical foundations of diversity and a concise summary of the school’s strategic plan to foster a diverse community. You can also find detailed information about the Arrabon Initiative, the two-year partnership to build a reconciled community. The plan to accomplish this goal calls for cultivating a sense of belonging for students of color, hiring a diverse faculty, bolstering recruitment and retention strategies,

retaining a diverse staff, increasing global engagement and building the necessary commitment and cultural skills. In addition, the Micah site features several leadership profiles, highlights the various committees dedicated to pursuing reconciliation on campus, includes recent data on school demographics, and provides information about admissions and scholarships.

Read about the academic initiatives underway that promote diversity such as a summary of curricular changes and various workshops and panels. The college has also posted all the policies addressing bias and harassment as well as relevant research, reports and other resources.

Throughout all these activities, Westmont keeps its focus on the gospel and the biblical call for reconciling with, loving and serving others. The work of overcoming racism and becoming a reconciling community has just begun and will require great commitment, perseverance and the grace of God in the coming years. 

