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. We must reconcile himself to us and call 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 February 8. She described Christ’s work 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.

February 8: Sheila Wise Rowe, executive director of Rejoice Both, an international healing and reconciliation ministry in Nahant, Massachusetts, is a Christian counselor, spiritual director, educator, writer and speaker.

February 8, 10: Darrell Williams, lead pastor of Living Faith Bible Fellowship in Tampa, Florida, serves on the Leadership Council of the Gospel Coalition and is the author of his 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 mission 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: Vincie Baru, 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 director of the Meacham School of Haymanot, which provides theological education for urban pastors and leaders.

February 24: Michael D. Reynolds is the director of Ministerial Development for WCSA, the director of Ministerial Development for the Church of God International Office, project director of the Black Church Studies program at the Lilly Initiative, and a former professor and pastor.

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

It’s essential that the church hears from brothers and sisters from different contexts and learns from their faith.

The Gospel and Community: Taking the Next Step

“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 Vincie Baru, president of the Meacham 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.

Celebrating Black History Month in Chapel

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

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The Gospel and Community: Taking the Next Step

“These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” I 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 reaches us 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 revisiting Westmont’s academic program. Revisiting 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 Haymanor.” Manasi “Goodie” Goodhoe presented the “The Second Phase and the Ongoing Work of Civil Rights.” Joel Goza, a speaker, community advocate and author of America’s Unshakable Christ, 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 connected 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 Westminster religious studies professor Helen Bee and Sameer Yadav discussing race, theology and political science. “I really loved the way Dr. 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. Tianna Krukar ’22, an Asian Student Association leader and double major in chemistry and psychology, cosponsored a small group with Todd Davis ’21 that encouraged students to discuss their relations and relate the content to their own experience. Krukar 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 Westminster’s ICP, 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.

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 Westminster.

“Jesus constantly cared for the oppressed and downtrodden,” says Ebun Kakejaye ’23. A political science major and co-leader of Westminster’s Black Student Union (BSU), Kakejaye 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 Dr. Bantu examined how Scripture addresses issues of racial prejudice,” she said.

“The Next Step has become a ritual for self-examination to consider the very soul of our nation. These issues are connected and cost something to address, but to not address these issues costs even more.”

Westmont, organized and participated with Araboron, the ethnic studies minor at Westmont. “Jesus constantly cared for the oppressed and downtrodden,” says Ebun Kakejaye ’23. A political science major and co-leader of Westminster’s Black Student Union (BSU), Kakejaye 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 Dr. 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.”

“The Next Step has a critical role for the Westminster 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 encompasing vision and challenged the Westminster community to embrace the uncomfortable aspects of pursuing justice.

Part of loving others well is making each person aware of their dignity as an image bearer of Christ.

The Gospel and Reconciliation: The Araboron Initiative and Reflections with David Bailey

“The Gospel and Reconciliation: The Araboron Initiative and Reflections with David Bailey”

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

“Holiness is a demonstration of the grace of God in your life. It’s not something that just happens. It requires intentionality.”

“The Gospel and Reconciliation: The Araboron Initiative and Reflections with David Bailey”

“We are the body of Christ. We are God’s people and we are called to be reconciling people. There’s no talk of ‘welcome home’ or ‘welcome back’; it’s about ‘welcome home’ or ‘welcome good,’” he says. Araboron strives to equip Westminster to do everything in its power to enable minority students to feel welcomed home.

The Becoming a Reconciling Community Leadership (BRC) team, composed of faculty, staff and students, works with Araboron to transform our institution into a reconciling community. Members include Gayle D. Beebe, president; Eddy Schulze, vice president for student life; Blake Thomas, director of the Center for Community Engagement Programs; Scott Lisea, campus pastor; Oguchi Newamelech, assistant professor of kinesiology; Dinora Cardoso, professor of Spanish; Eratou Manlapig, associate professor of economics and business; and Bailey.

Schulze praises Araboron’s work and appreciates the privilege of listening and learning from Bailey. “It’s not something that we do because we are told, but how we are being,” she says. “Westmont’s commitment 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.”

“Araboron 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 Araboron 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.

Araboron seeks to transform every level of an institution: faculty, staff, student leaders, staff, faculty, staff, students, parents and alums. Typically, this process involves conflict, as people may view reconciliation as a counterintuitive concept. “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 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.

The Gospel in Action: Micah 6:8