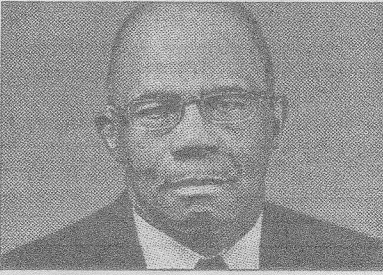


LOUIS A. BUTCHER JR.



SUNDAY'S GUEST

Where do we stand on race?

I wonder how we are getting along as a nation these days, particularly as it relates to race relations and diversity. Because the news media was anxious to grade our new president on his first 100 days in office, perhaps it would not hurt to evaluate our own relationships. From the Pledge of Allegiance come the words, "One nation under God indivisible ..."

In many respects today we are one nation indivisible and not completely by choice. I submit that we are one nation in recession; one nation with enormous debt and massive spending; one nation under constant terrorist threats; and one nation increasingly dependent on our technology. Technology? How would we survive without our instant communication devices? When is the last time you made a call from a phone booth? As a matter of fact, when is the last time you SAW a phone booth? Poor Superman.

The common maladies we face tend to make us one. As Americans, we rally in the face of quantum adversity — 9/11 — and agree to lay aside differences at least for the moment. But as to cultures, ideologies, and worldview, we are different. As the demographics of our nation con-

**eliminating racism
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The Rev. Louis A. Butcher Jr. is pastor of Bright Side Baptist Church. E-mail him at myblessedlife@aol.com.

tinue to change, our outlooks on life will be even more divergent. For me that is a very comforting and a very scary thought.

With the emergence of Sen. Barack Obama, a candidate of color, I noticed a surge in discourse and discussions concerning race during the presidential election and afterward, up until a few weeks past the inauguration. However, there seems to be far less interest in race with the national media. When asked how significant his victory was in terms of race, President Obama said he thought about it for probably a day and then moved on. The absence of lingering conversation about it says something about our nation.

While there is ample political and policy debate, it appears that the country is very comfortable with an African-American presi-

dent and first family. Controversies surrounding immigration and same-sex marriage are at the forefront now.

Recessions are unpleasant and hurtful, but when they are as deep as the one we are experiencing, I think people feel we are all in this together. If that is true, the challenge will be to maintain that same spirit as prosperity returns.

The national scene is one thing. But what's happening in our backyard? It is difficult to tell because often racism and intolerance are personal experiences. That is not to say they do not exist. However, with the diversity of ethnicity, culture, and religions in Lancaster County, many disputes may not have racial overtones at all. Schools have problems, but their districts appear to be pursuing ways to solve them.

As report cards go, I don't know what grade our communities should receive relative to overcoming racism. I'm sure you have ideas. We do read about incidences here. But there are positive efforts as well. One such effort is the annual Race Against Racism, sponsored by the Lancaster YWCA.

Held this past April in its 11th year, the race drew about 3,000 registered participants and several hundred volunteers. Response to racial problems in a local school district, last year saw a huge increase in event numbers which was maintained this year. According to Angie Lightfoot-Roth, finance director and a race coordinator, people from all parts of the county and beyond participated.

The race was initiated in 1999 by the national organization for many YWCAs across the country. Lancaster's is now the largest and longest running. Lightfoot-Roth believes it is a forceful statement that our citizens are opposed to racism and are pledged to be respectful to each other. Although it has become a significant fundraiser in recent years, the goal remains to eliminate racism. Part of the proceeds provide training and study materials on racial harmony.

Another major initiative of the YW is the Racial Justice Institute, which will be held in June. The three-day conference will host two national trainers; the event is open to organizations and individuals. The aim is not only to learn, but to leave with an action plan to help create an equal and just environment in our communities.

Racism will never be eliminated, and even what it really is will be debated by those that are considered perpetrators and those who are considered victims. In honesty, the minority population here is not large. That will likely change. Should we then not simply seek to treat others as we desire to be treated ourselves? That's certainly not a new idea, but it works. Times will get better and our communities will become more diverse. How we all react will determine future quality of life in our scenic county.