



The Damascus Road  
Anti-Racism Process

# Damascus Road Newsletter

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## Damascus Road creates a new training model

For five days in late February and early March, five Damascus Road staff gathered at a Catholic retreat center in Cleveland to develop a new anti-racism analysis training model. Reflecting back on what he learned from the event, Phil Brubaker said, "I learned that it is possible for a multiracial group to work together at something completely collaboratively." This article gives witness to what God did through us during those five days to make that collaboration possible.

Three weeks previous to our gathering we received a letter from Crossroads Ministry indicating that Damascus Road was no longer given permission to use their 2½-day analysis training model. In late fall of 1999 we had made a decision to develop our own core training personnel and to no longer use Crossroads staff in our training process. Although we had not been expecting so definitive a response, we were anticipating significant change.

We had already begun to spend time as a Damascus Road core training team evaluating how we were going to make our trainings authentically Anabaptist. While we were already headed in this direction, Crossroads' decision forced us to find a way to develop a new training model of our own sooner and more completely than we had originally planned. We entered the process uncertain of what would develop but grateful for the many years of partnership with Crossroads that had brought us to a point of being able to develop our own model.

Within a week we found five days on our calendars when five of us-Phil Brubaker, Iris deLeon-Hartshorn, Conrad Moore, Regina Shands Stoltzfus and

Tobin Miller Shearer could meet. In a few days we had found a retreat center near Regina's home in Cleveland that could house us all. Already it felt like God was opening a door for us to step through.

We arrived late on Feb. 28 and began work the next morning. Each day one of us was responsible for leading our worship time, setting the agenda, and facilitating the day's work. While we had sketched out the general topics we hoped to address each day, it was up to the individual facilitator to decide what would happen and how.

Iris reflected on what was for her the most difficult part of the process: "At the beginning I wasn't sure how we were going to do something different from what we had done in previous years. At first I didn't trust my creativity." After the first day, that sense of uncertainty began to dissolve for all of us. Not only had we been able to articulate and develop a new training philosophy (see page 3) but we had brainstormed our way through the major concepts we wanted to include.

During interviews for this article, every one of us noted the same particularly powerful moment where we saw God working among us. By the morning of the third day one entire wall was covered with the sequence of exercises and input we wanted to include, but we had not yet articulated the primary themes to hold them together. At the completion of our worship time, Regina said, "The three themes we need to talk about are brokenness, healing and bread for the journey."

Conrad captured the significance of this moment when he said, "God made it clear to us that the major themes of the training needed to reflect our faith-based perspective. The next day Regina brought the three themes that fit exactly."

As powerful as this was, there were other times that challenged us to stay focused and engaged with one another. In particular we had to struggle to find three biblical texts to represent the themes of the training. At one point we simply stopped the discussion and committed ourselves to prayer about the impasse. By the next morning we returned and with minimal additional discussion arrived at a new text about which we all felt positive.

By the end of the fifth day we had completely organized the themes, sequence and content of every major piece. Most of them were fully scripted and, thanks to the technological wizardry that Phil brought to the team, we even had the majority of the content already formatted in a trainers' manual. Within a week and a half we had begun using the new model. Although we have kept the same analysis framework that has been at the core of the Damascus Road training model since its inception, we have made other significant changes. They include these:

- a much more overtly faith-based perspective;
- a deliberate Anabaptist focus, content and application;
- new sections on colonialism and assimilation;
- new metaphors for the paralyzed community;

- a central iceberg metaphor to explore levels, shapes and manifestations of racism;
- more time for caucusing;
- a clearly articulated anti-racism training philosophy;
- biblical content that follows the three themes of brokenness, healing and bread for the journey;
- more time for participant-led worship.

We asked each trainer to identify how it felt to be a part of developing this new model. Independent of each other, our responses were almost identical: "energizing, exciting, fearful, cool." Conrad said, "I felt important to God. He used me when I know that there are people out there who are more capable, but he chose to use me to be part of this whole business."

To be clear, the process was not without its difficulties. Iris talked about how hard it was to be patient. Tobin noted how much he had to struggle with letting go of control. Conrad mentioned how difficult it was to be away from family that many days in a row after having just completed a three-day analysis training the day before we left. Regina found it hard to let go of the old model. Phil struggled with figuring out an exercise to bring white people to an understanding of white identity.

Spending time in prayer, caucusing as white people and people of color, and having fun together were all key to working through these difficulties. We did no evening work other than to watch some popular culture videos, buy Duplo blocks and laugh out loud together.

In the months since that experience we have kept adapting and refining the training model. Part of our new training philosophy is to continue in that evaluation and review process on a regular basis. Having used the model now four times since its inception, we've noticed that God has given us some other gifts as well.

First of all, our training team is on much more equal footing because we developed the model together. We all brought unique gifts to the development process. They are reflected in the model as it now exists.

Second, based on the 125 evaluation forms received thus far, we have seen no critiques that our analysis felt like a black-and-white issue. Likewise, we've seen proportionately fewer comments about feeling like we're being "fed a party-line." And, perhaps most significantly for us on the training team, we have seen no comments to date that the faith-based material feels like an add-on. The process of using the new model, despite some rough spots along the way, continues to feel like a confirmation that we have been hearing from God.

Finally, the new model has given us a new degree of flexibility to adapt the model to appropriate settings, whether congregations, colleges or mission agencies.

The themes of brokenness, healing and bread for the journey speak powerfully to anti-racism work in any of those settings.

We began this article with the gift of learning that Phil brought away from the process, that it is possible for a multiracial group to work together at something completely collaboratively. We'll begin to close here with the gifts that the rest of us were given.

Conrad: I learned to not downplay my role in this work, to recognize that what I have to say is important and does make a contribution to the overall work. That process helped me feel more confident about my ability to contribute.

Iris: My tendency is to hurry up and see the by-product. We weren't able to begin see it until the third day. I learned to be patient and follow the process that God reveals.

Regina: I learned that it's good to work as a team. We came up with something that was far stronger than could come out of a single person.

Tobin: I learned to be grateful for God working in remarkable ways that I'm not able to control.

Anyone who has gone through Damascus Road analysis training of 2½ days or more who would like to experience the new elements of this model should contact Conrad Moore at the Damascus Road offices to find out when the next "Bread for the Journey" event is scheduled in your area. These team resource events will include presentations from the new model.

In conclusion, here is the dedication that appears in every new Damascus Road training manual: "This training model was originally developed by Phil Brubaker, Iris de Leon-Hartshorn, Conrad Moore, Regina Shands Stoltzfus and Tobin Miller Shearer, Feb. 29-March 4. We dedicate this model to God, our source of inspiration and strength, and to our families, whose sacrifice and unwavering support has helped make this possible. We would like to acknowledge many years of partnership with Crossroads Ministry. Their insight and analysis have been important in our work to develop this thoroughly Anabaptist anti-racism training model."

*Conrad Moore and Tobin Miller Shearer*

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## **Behind the philosophy of training**

During the days we met to create the new training model, one of the first questions we considered was the reason we do this work. Each of us has a personal answer to that question, which includes our sense of call from God.

Because this corporate work would be the foremost product of Damascus Road, it was crucial that we understood why we were doing this work in this particular way and what we were attempting to accomplish. The why and how are simple: This is God's work; we are merely instruments, and we do this work in

community. (See box at right.) Having these basic underlying assumptions about an anti-racism training model helped us in our brainstorming session.

Our philosophy notes that we need to bring each participant to a point of crisis that brings about a decision for change, yet it is as much our responsibility to provide pastoral care during the process. Therefore, we trainers need to pay attention to our own preparation as we lead people through this process. The trainer's responsibility begins long before the event begins. In addition, the team must support and care for one another.

We hope each person who experiences the new model will take the time to understand the philosophy behind it and help us review and update it on a regular basis.

*Regina Shands Stoltzfus*

### ***Training philosophy (a summary)***

As followers of Jesus we understand the call of God to work against all forms of oppression.

Crisis is necessary for both personal and systemic change.

While both people and institutions need to change, Damascus Road's primary organizing work is, through anti-racist education, to prepare teams to act as change agents in their institutions.

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## **Damascus Road Steering Committee calls for practical accountability**

Making accountability to the oppressed community practical emerged as a central theme of the Damascus Road Anti-Racism Table (ART) meetings held May 5-6 in San Antonio, Texas. Nine ART members and four Damascus Road staff agreed on several major actions during the 1½-day meeting. A new initiative to invite all Damascus Road network members to prayerfully enter into personal relationships with people of color at the grassroots received much discussion. After a caucusing process, people of color at the meetings underlined the importance of this call for members of the network, both white people and people of color.

Speaking about the need to keep connected to the grassroots, Zulma Prieto challenged the group to "not let the same thing happen that happened to peace and justice folks: The best writers and best speakers have all have the right words, but people at the congregation have no idea what they're talking about."

ART members also shared their gratitude for the work of Damascus Road during the past five years. Rachel Yoder said, "God has worked powerfully among us and I am deeply grateful."

In addition to articulating this call for grassroots relationship building, ART members

- made plans to initiate a national gathering of people of color to give leadership to developing accountability structures for anti-racism work in the church;
- reserved two slots on the Damascus Road ART for members of the oppressed community as a first step toward structuring accountability. A process for naming those members will be identified by the national people of color caucus described above;
- reaffirmed staff's decision to separate from Crossroads Ministry and made clear the centrality of the anti-racism analysis that has been at the core of Damascus Road educating and organizing for the past five years;
- encouraged emphasizing work with both white people and people of color on the dual issues of internalized racist superiority and internalized racist oppression;
- identified the importance of people of color giving leadership to the work of Damascus Road.

The Anti-Racism Table is made up of members of the former Damascus Road Steering Committee and Racism Awareness Program Reference Committee. Membership is intentionally made up of a majority of people of color as well as white members of the Damascus Road network. Members of teams active in colleges, conference bodies, mission agencies and congregations are included in the group as well.

Current Anti-Racism Table members are Zenebe Abebe (Goshen, Ind.), Phil Bergey (Souderton, Pa.), Ron Byler (Goshen, Ind.), Maggie DeLeon (Mathis, Texas), Jim Elam (Wichita, Kan.), Lyn Hershey (Payette, Idaho), Jeanine Jordan (Fort Wayne, Ind.), Karen McCabe Juhnke (Newton, Kan.), Saul Murcia (Austin, Texas), John Powell (Buffalo, N.Y.), Zulma Prieto (Goshen, Ind.), Noel Santiago (Souderton, Pa.), Jeannie Romero Talbert (Harrisburg, Pa.), Mary Mitchell Trejo (Chinle, Ariz.) and Rachel Yoder (Fort Wayne, Ind.).

*Tobin Miller Shearer*

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## **Developing authentic relationships**

The Damascus Road Anti-Racism Table (ART) challenges members to engage in a prayerful process as a means of establishing relationships with people of color at the grassroots.

In originally proposing the idea, ART member Zulma Prieto challenged: "Even though we have a good anti-racism analysis on our teams, we still need the presence and input from people of color—specifically from the grassroots community. It's imperative that each of us, including people of color, has a

relationship with a person of color from the grassroots community. Jesus was with the poor. For our spiritual accountability, not just accountability to this work, we need to follow his model."

In his full article, Noel goes on to stress the importance of praying together and developing authentic relationships. A complete copy of this edited article can be obtained by contacting the Damascus Road offices. We look forward to hearing from you in the network how God is working among you to this end.

In Luke 10:1-9 Jesus presents some clues for us about one way to work at developing authentic relationships with persons of color at the grassroots. Jesus presents us with a four-step process that may guide us as we seek to develop these authentic relationships. (I want to acknowledge that I don't intend for this to be a formulaic process. Rather I trust it provides some steps that focus a direction).

### ***Step one: Blessing***

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house'" (10:5).

We bless people today by praying: for our neighbors, for that person of color at the grassroots whom we don't know yet. Bless them. Speak peace to them. Pray for them.

Why is this so important? I have discovered for myself that when I am challenged in the way you may be feeling challenged now (to develop a relationship with a person of color at the grassroots) I tend to take the challenge on as a project or task to accomplish. To the degree I accomplish this task or project, to that degree I feel good about myself. You see what the problem can be already? This is not about a job to do, a task to complete or a project to accomplish. This is about coming to a place within yourself where you care about people of color at the grassroots.

Starting with prayer transforms you first. You are the one positioning yourself before God and opening yourself to the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit. You are opening yourself up to become vulnerable before God as to your own motivations, pride, self-esteem needs and more.

As you allow God's Spirit to examine you, you will need to make a choice. Will you indeed be transformed by allowing God to deposit God's heart in you, or will you seek to pursue what you think is the best way to go?

Who knows what the "issues" will be for you or how it will happen? That's not the point. The point is that God will confront you as God shows you your heart. With grace God will give you God's heart for those around you.

## ***Step two: Fellowship***

"Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you" (10:7).

Eating and drinking point to fellowship. Hanging out together and enjoying each other's company. The reason you do this is because you genuinely care for the person you are praying for. On our own we can't care for people as deeply as Christ does. Now what is happening is that you are caring for this person with Christ's heart.

As you begin to develop a relationship with a person of color at the grassroots you will be tempted to convince them of your motives. Don't.

You are now about accepting them for who they are and how they are. If you start convincing them of your motives, what they will experience is that you are only being their friend to prove that you aren't racist. Nobody wants to be somebody else's project. This is one reason so many barriers continue to be in place. We have not taken the time to develop caring relationships. We think we have, but we haven't. Until we are transformed by God's Spirit, first through prayer, then in the context of this relationship, we cannot expect to get to the place where we are real with one another.

This in turn keeps us divided from one another and allows us to say things such as, "I'm not racist because so-and-so (a person of color) is my friend." Those of you who have viewed the video True Colors will remember that both participants were friends. Yet an understanding of what a person of color actually experiences when in the same situation as a white person was not present.

We have to take the time. This is a huge challenge in our society, where time is everything. I trust that you can begin to appreciate why the prayer piece of this is so important.

*Noel Santiago*

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