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## *It Feels Like Church to Us*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Rev. George M. Maxwell, Jr.**

I have been listening to a lot of podcasts lately.

I like the convenience of the format. I can listen while I'm walking or doing something around the house. I can stop and, when I get back to it, start again from the beginning or pick up where I left off.

I also like the intimacy of it. I like the feeling of being with the presenter. Over time, I feel like I'm listening to a friend. I learn something, of course, but I also find myself empathizing with whoever is speaking; I feel a little of what they are feeling and see more things from the perspective that they are taking, even if I don't agree with everything that they are saying.

I listened to Brené Brown interview Austin Channing Brown last week. Despite having the same last name, the Browns are related only by their friendship. We have read and talked about Brené for years at the Cathedral, but you may not be as familiar with Austin Channing Brown. Austin wrote the book *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*, and moderates an online television show, *The Next Question*.

They talked about the black experience in America in stark and at times uncomfortable ways, but I could feel the truth of it in part because of their friendship. Listening to Brené listen to Austin helped me to listen to her as well. I heard things that I already knew as if for the first time.

I found myself nodding in agreement when Brené said, "I'm here to get it right, not to be right."

And, I knew what she meant near the end of the interview when Brené said to Austin, "You feel like church to me."

Maybe that's why Austin's warning that the work of antiracism is not just about interracial friendships resonated so deeply with me.

"The work of antiracism," she said, "is the work of becoming a better human to other humans."

Interracial friendships are important to the work, especially to the extent that they provide a context for white people to listen to, accept the criticism of, and otherwise learn from people of color. But, being friends is not the end of the work. The work is also about dismantling the structures of racism on which our society has been built. The burden of changing white hearts and minds can't rest entirely on the shoulders of people of color.

And so, one question Austin thinks white people should ask themselves is, "In your interracial relationships, what are you giving?"

My wife, Mary Hunter, and I have been asking ourselves that question lately.

Like many of you, we have been struggling to figure out exactly what is ours to do in the midst of the rising awareness of and conversation around racial injustice in this country.

We know that the issues are complex, and the final answers won't come quickly or comfortably.

We also know that we need to listen to people of color in order to begin to understand how and what we can do

to support them. We have, though, found something that we can do today to support the efforts of our church to do the work.

In February of this year, we met and got to know Dr. W. Franklin Evans, the president of Voorhees College. Voorhees is an HBCU that is affiliated with the Episcopal Church. It has a small student body, a somewhat remote location, and is rooted in the liberal arts. Many of the students it serves are the first in their families to go to college.

We were impressed by the school and the work that Dr. Evans is doing there. When Dr. Evans asked Mary Hunter to join the Board of Trustees of the school, she enthusiastically accepted. It felt like this was a place that we could give, work that was ours to do.

The college is facing a significant revenue loss due to the COVID crisis. They don't have a margin for error—which is directly related to the systematic oppression of people of color for the 123 years Voorhees has been in existence—and we, the Episcopal Church, can help create some breathing room in the budget of this very special Episcopal school.

I know that each of you are looking for ways to do the work of antiracism in your own sphere of influence. There are many opportunities out there. We encourage you, though, to look for ways to support the Episcopal Church in the many ways that it is already doing the work.

If you would like to support Voorhees, we would welcome your help. Just let us know.

It feels like church to us.