



# EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT

PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

## A Process for Opening Up about Racism

*In June 2018, the Leadership Gathering (Mission Council, Standing Committee, Commission on Ministry, and Donations & Bequests) of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut spent the morning at their quarterly meeting devoted to the study and witness of the impact of the sin of racism on our common life as directed by a 2017 ECCT Convention resolution on racial reconciliation. In the four gatherings in 2018 in which racial reconciliation was a focus, a major learning was that in order to begin the work of dismantling racism we needed to start with our own stories and personal experiences. Reading a book together, discussing it, and opening ourselves to others while listening to others was an important first step, acknowledging that this work is ongoing and lifelong. Providing a safe space for such conversations is also important; chaplains were present at each gathering for the specific purpose of listening and being available for counsel if needed.*

*What follows is an outline of this process, which can be used and adapted by congregations and groups to further their own understandings and experiences of racism. The group was assigned to read *Waking Up White* (the "homework") by Debbie Irving in advance. A small passage from the book was used for *Dwelling in the Word*. The resources used in the Leadership Gathering are included here; congregations may choose to use different prayers and/or scripture, book excerpt, or quote. This gathering will take about 2 hours; a break can be scheduled after "Round 1" of the story sharing if needed.*

## Claiming Who We Are: Stories of Racism

### *Advanced Preparation:*

- Invite a chaplain or two (depending on the size of your group) to be present during your gathering
- Invite readers for the opening prayer
- Invite four individuals to share brief, personal stories on how racism has impacted their life

*Materials:*

- Opening and Closing Prayer (handout for each participant)
- Bibles (or scripture on a handout for each participant)
- time keeping device (cell phones work)

*Room set-up:*

- Chairs in a circle, with room to move into smaller groups of 4-5 people.
- Focal point in the middle of the circle: a lit candle, icon, Bible, etc. on a small table

**Opening Prayer<sup>1</sup>** (5 minutes)

Reader 1: We come into this space,  
as people blessed by the touch of God;  
as people enriched by cultures born into and discovered;  
as people wounded by racism;  
as people yearning for healing;  
as people working for the Kingdom.

ALL: God, be with us.

Reader 2: We come into this space,  
with anticipation of the work before us;  
with an openness to discovery;  
with a commitment to working for reconciliation;  
with a willingness to challenge and be challenged;  
with anticipation of discovery.

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer by Jody Miller Shearer. *Seeing the Face of God in Each Other: Antiracism Training Manual* (Diversity, Social, and Environmental Ministries Team, Mission Department of the Episcopal Church Center, 2011), 35.

ALL: Christ, come near us.

Reader 3: We come into this space,  
to spend time with the Scriptures;  
to learn about prejudice;  
to become aware of privilege;  
to explore cultures;  
to encourage each other to action.

ALL: Holy Spirit, bless our time together. Amen.

**Dwelling in the Word** (15 minutes)

Choose a portion of scripture, a quote, or book that has been read by the group.

From *Waking Up White* by Debbie Irving (Elephant Room Press, 2014), 249.

“Self-examination and the courage to admit to bias and unhelpful inherited behaviors may be our greatest tools for change. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable enough to expose our ignorance and insecurities takes courage. And love. I believe the most loving thing a person, or a group of people, can do for another is to examine the ways in which their own insecurities and assumptions interfere with others’ ability to thrive. Please join me in opening your heart and mind to the possibility of you—yes, even well-intentioned you—have room to change and grow, so that you can work with people of all colors and ethnicities to co-create communities that can unite, strengthen, and prosper.”

1. Where did your imagination stop?
2. Are there words, phrases, ideas that grasp at you?
3. How might the Holy Spirit be nudging you?

### **“Homework” Review** (15 minutes)

This is a time for the group to reflect on what they read (or watched or listened to). It can be done in small groups or in the large group.

1. What surprised you?
2. What challenged you?
3. Where has reading [*title of reading assignment*] connected with you?

### **Claiming Who We Are** (60 minutes)

1. In advance, arrange for four individuals (two for each section) to share a story to the entire group. These should be first person accounts that they were involved in or impacted by and should take no more than 3 minutes for each person.
2. “Round 1” – two individuals share a story of racism from their childhood.
3. Once they both have told their stories, invited participants to break into groups of 4 or 5, moving their chairs so they are facing each other.
4. Each person in the small group is then invited to share their own story. This is a time to listen to each other; there should be no questions, comments, or “fixing” after each story is told, just simple silence before the next person tells their story.

#### ***Round 1: Stories of Racism from our Childhoods*** (20 minutes)

Share a personal story you recall about race from your childhood. For example, what is your first memory of a person who didn’t look like you? What did you learn about race in school – teachers, books, other children?

5. Regather the group.
6. “Round 2” – two individuals share a story of racism from a church experience
7. Again, once they both have told their stories, invited participants to break back into their same group of 4 or 5, moving their chairs so they are facing each other.

8. Each person in the small group is then invited to share their own story. This is a time to listen to each other; there should be no questions, comments, or “fixing” after each story is told, just simple silence before the next person tells their story.

***Round 2: Stories of Racism from our Churches*** (20 minutes)

Share a personal story about what you have experienced or seen regarding racism in a church where you have worshipped.

**Reflection** (10 minutes)

1. Regather as a group.
2. Invite reflection from participants with questions such as:
  - What surprised you?
  - What did you learn about yourself?
  - What are you being called to discover about yourself?
  - How is the Spirit calling you now?

**Next Steps** (10 minutes)

Discuss what the group (or individuals) might want to do as a next step.

- Read a book
- Watch a movie
- Bible study
- Other . . .

**Closing Prayer** (5 minutes)

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all

nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen. (BCP p. 815)*