

Working Toward Racial Justice In the Eastern Synod and Our Communities

We believe that all humans are created in the image of God. Since every person bears this image, each person is special – offering us a glimpse into the Divine. When members of our human family are treated in ways that do not demonstrate their value and dignity, it is a contradiction to our beliefs and values. It is God’s will for all people to be treated with love and respect; when we fail to do this, we go against the Kingdom of God.

Racial discrimination is a part of our society and world. It is a deep and persistent issue. White privilege exists; and the challenge is that many of us do not even perceive it because our daily lives are largely White. When you are surrounded by homogeneity, then you do not notice any disparity. Many of us claim that we are not racist without a clear understanding of what racism really means. Others of us are very aware of racial injustice, having experienced it ourselves. All of us need to care about this injustice, to be aware of its presence in our communities, and to take steps together toward justice and equity.

At the Eastern Synod Assembly in June 2018, the gathered assembly participated in an evening of worship and learning about Racial Justice. Throughout the evening, we prayed, we considered some definitions, we participated in an exercise often referred to as ‘the colour-line’, and did some brainstorming about ways to move forward both as individuals and as a Synod. This resource is an effort to give the whole Synod an opportunity to participate in a similar exercise.

As you begin, it is very important to understand the need to create safe space for this conversation. We strongly encourage you to prepare your group for this activity; this preparation will look different depending on the make up of your group. Consider how your participants might feel, who might be centered out. Engage your group in this conversation about ensuring safe space, consider assigning a chaplain for the duration of the exercise. For participants of all races, the experience can range from disconcerting to traumatic; we strongly encourage you to give fair warning of the emotional nature of this exercise and to plan for follow up and pastoral care for individuals who experience distress. We also recommend allowing for people to opt-out of participating. Be mindful that the tools of Confession & Forgiveness that are included below can be very helpful to this learning process. Should you have questions or concerns about this, you are welcome to reach out to a member of the committee listed below.

Begin with Prayer

God of love,

You created a world rich with diversity. You made small flowers and big flowers, pink and purple and yellow and orange flowers. You made creatures that jump and swim, creatures that fly and creatures that slither. You created people, in your image. Some of us are tall, some short, some slim, some wider, some Black, some Brown, some White. We have different abilities and gifts and faces... and we are all made in your image. We are all your children. Guide us now in our learning, open our minds to your vision for us and fill our hearts with your love. In Jesus’ name we pray.

Amen.

Four Agreements for Courageous Conversations:¹

Read these aloud. Have them posted in your space throughout your time together.

¹ Singleton, Glenn & Curtis Linton. *Courageous Conversation About Race*. California: Corwin Press. 2006.

1. **Stay Engaged** - If you notice yourself not engaged ask why. Is it because content is challenging or uncomfortable? Is there something I need to do for myself to be fully present?
2. **Experience Discomfort** - There is content in this program that might be challenging. It is in discomfort that learning and change often happen. If uncomfortable, ask why. Resist first reaction that might be to make yourself comfortable right away.
3. **Speak Your Truth** - We will all be speaking from our experiences. Two words to emphasize: YOUR: speak from your experience. Be aware that others are speaking their experience. TRUTH: Reflect on your truth and what informs it. Don't assume the experience of others or use the experience for others to support an argument. Be open to your truth being shifted as you listen to the truths of others and through your own self-reflection and self-critique.
4. **Expect and Accept Non-Closure** - While we anticipate this time together might change us, we also anticipate we will not agree on everything. The purpose of conversations is not to get everyone to agree with you. Know that there might not be time to bring conversations to resolution or even an ending.

Definitions:

In order to be able to have a fruitful discussion, it is important to understand the dynamics at play. These are four definitions that you will see build on one another. It might be helpful during your exercise to lift up these definitions – either by printing them out or projecting them on a screen. A more fulsome set of definitions is attached (Appendix A).

Stereotype is a generalized image and conception of an identifiable group of people resulting in the conscious or unconscious categorization of every member of the group without regard for individual differences.

Prejudice is literally the prejudging of another person or group of people negatively or positively, based on assumptions and stereotypes that prevent objective consideration of a behaviour or situation.

Discrimination is the unfair treatment of a person or group of people based on prejudice.

Racism is the belief that one race is superior, reinforced by corporate or institutional power and privilege – the power to impact negatively in systemic ways on another group or person. In Canada, it is the experience of people of colour, including Indigenous peoples, within a structure that favours White people. Sometimes racism is very simple and sometimes nuanced, sometimes overt and sometimes deep inside of us.

Colour Line Exercise (Appendix B)

This exercise requires both a place where people can answer their questions, tally a score, and a place where people can move around. Either a sanctuary or church hall can work. We recommend having someone read the statements aloud, with only a few seconds to answer each question, and a couple of minutes at the end to do math. You'll then want to have numbers posted in a progressive line. 100 – 90 – 80 – 70 – etc. Once people have tallied their score, then you can invite them to go and take a place in the line under their score.

Again, the results of this can be shocking to some. You may have a large group of people in the high end numbers, with a few people lower who have intersections and a small cohort of racialized people in the lower end. Be attentive to the people around the room who might need some follow up and/or pastoral care afterwards.

For those groups who are almost or completely White, we have included the real score of 3 people of colour who have answered these questions. We suggest writing their names, scores, and information on a large piece of paper and posting them on the wall once the group begins to find their own place along the line.

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Melissa | Janaki | Raymond |
| score: 44 | Score: 31 | Score: 47 |
| Race: Black | Race: Indo-Asian | Race: Black |
| Education: MSW | Education: BSc, MSc Engineering, MDiv. | Education: Trade-cabinetmaker |
| Employment: Manager in a Community Organization | Employment: Full-time Pastor | Employment: Head Finisher at a custom kitchen company |

Once people are in line, ask them to take a moment to look up and down and take note of what they see.

Discussion Questions/Debriefing the Experience

Small table groups are helpful for these questions. Assign one person the role of facilitator and encourage them to follow the guidelines below. It may be helpful to print these instructions out on a half sheet and distribute them to your groups.

Facilitators

Thank you for taking the role of table facilitator.

Your role is to:

- Mind the time
- Keep the group on topic
- Invite and allow all participants the opportunity to speak
- Encourage gratitude for people's sharing

Please read the following to the table participants:

This exercise is a short workshop presented in a limited amount of time and is just a small introduction to a much longer and more complex journey.

Questions for the Table

What are you feeling? What were your observations from where you found yourself in the line?
(5 minutes)

Given the reflections of this experience, what is God calling us to do? What are the personal commitments we are called to make?

(10 minutes)

What concrete next steps can the church take to support your personal commitments and to move forward as a church? (10 minutes)

Confession & Forgiveness

You might find it helpful to include a piece of liturgy into your event. Certainly, begin with prayer. You may want to end with this acknowledgement of our place in the system, a desire to do better, and a reminder of God's grace in the midst of brokenness.

Confession:

Let us pray.

Life-giving God, You created each one of us in your mysterious and divine image. Your love formed and shaped us. We are diverse and beautiful. We confess, though, that we have not always valued the beauty and diversity of human life. Forgive us for the times we have failed to recognize your image in each other.

Silence...

You intended for us to be partners-with you, with the earth, and with one another-to tend to and to share your abundant life. We confess, though, that we have failed to create the kind of human community where all have access to your abundant life. Forgive us for creating and maintaining divisions that privilege some and deny others.

Silence...

Merciful God, forgive us. Heal and transform us so that we may see each other as you see us, that we may advocate for your justice for all people and create your beloved community among us. Amen.

Absolution:

Hear the good news: We are forgiven and always made new. The power of God's love working in us and the gift of grace in Jesus Christ set us free to be beloved community. We have been given the grace to move beyond prejudice and to live faithfully within God's intention for life together. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Racial Justice Advisory Committee Members

Each member of our committee is passionate about this work. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to any one of those listed.

Rev. Joanna Miller, chair
joanna.e.miller@gmail.com
519-754-2434

Rev. Katherine Gohm, Ministry Director for Public Policy and Service Ministries
katherinegohm26@gmail.com
519-852-4164

The Reverend Canon Norman Casey, Anglican Church of Canada
Suicide Prevention Co-Ordinator
nrcasey@caseyhr.com
519-865-1525

Rev. Jennifer Hoover
hooverwirt@gmail.com

Deacon Scott Knarr
scott.knarr@mzlc.ca
519-503-5756

Rev. JoAnne Chung Yan Lam
PastorJoAnneLam@gmail.com
Meet via appointments at <http://joannelam.me>

Pat Lovell
pmlovell@sympatico.ca
905-336-3331

Rev. Dr. Philip Mathai
pmathai@gmail.com

Rev. Dr. Mary (Joy) Philip
Associate Professor, Martin Luther University College
mphilip@luther.wlu.ca
519-884-0710 x3576

Rev. Rick Pryce
rdpryce@bellaliant.net
902-634-8395

Emily Savage
esavage3@gmail.com

Rev. Jonathan Schmidt, Canadian Council of Churches
schmidt@councilofchurches.ca

Rev. Sylvia Swiatoschik
sa.swiatoschik@outlook.com

Rev. Chun Zhang
Chunzhang777@gmail.com

APPENDIX A

Working Definitions for Racial Justice Discussions

Race is a social construct which artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly skin colour), cultural affiliation, or ethnic classification.

Ethnicity refers to a sense of identity based on common language, ancestral geographic location, religion, and cultural heritage.

Stereotype is a generalized image and conception of an identifiable group of people resulting in the conscious or unconscious categorization of every member of the group without regard for individual differences.

Prejudice is literally the prejudging of another person or group of people negatively or positively, based on assumptions and stereotypes that prevent objective consideration of a behaviour or situation.

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Racism is the belief that one race is superior, reinforced by corporate or institutional power and privilege – the power to impact negatively in systemic ways on another group or person. In Canada, it is the experience of people of colour, including Indigenous peoples, within a structure that favours White people. Sometimes racism is very simple and sometimes nuanced, sometimes overt and sometimes deep inside of us.

Privilege is the unearned power that gives certain groups economic, social and political advantages simply by virtue of belonging to the dominant societal group, often enjoyed unconsciously.

Oppression is a system of inequality which gives privilege to members of one group of people at the expense of another.

White Privilege is the social construct which theorizes that White people are superior to all others. Consciously or unconsciously, White people are privileged and given preference in law and societal norms which reinforce a dominant culture of “whiteness” as the standard for all groups. White privilege is not earned; it cannot be given away; and there is no choice of non-participation.

Colonialism is the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another nation [its people, its resources, its land, its culture], occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically. We have inherited settler status because the structures of colonial domination remain and continue to benefit us whether we are first or eleventh generation on these lands. In Canada, this oppression has included the cultural genocide of the Original Peoples.

Racial Justice is the approach or combined strategies that work to address the inequities of systemic or structural racism. It is the proactive reinforcement of policies, attitudes and actions to produce opportunities and positive outcomes for all people.

Sources: [Cracking open White identity towards transformation](#), Canadian Council of Churches, 2012; [Working Definitions](#), ELCA Racial Justice/Anti-racism, 2008; [Why the term ‘settler’ needs to stick](#), Snelgrove & Woldenga, 2013; [Definitions](#), Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning of the Canadian Council of Churches; [How to have helpful conversations about race in the church](#), Women of the ELCA, 2016; Oxford Dictionary.

APPENDIX B

Colour Line Exercise

For each statement, give yourself a score using the following:

5 – if the statement is mostly true for you

3 – if the statement is sometimes true for you

0 – if the statement is seldom true for you

| Statement | Score: |
|---|--------|
| 1. Most of my friends are the same racial or ethnic background as I am. | |
| 2. I can go shopping alone, most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store staff. | |
| 3. I can turn on the television or look at the front page of the newspaper and see people of my race and/or sexual orientation widely represented. | |
| 4. I can be sure that when my children go to school, their classroom materials will testify to the existence of their race. They will study the history and culture of my ethnic ancestors in elementary and secondary school. | |
| 5. I can go into supermarkets and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions; I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my culture represented; I can go into any hairdresser and find someone who can cut my hair. | |
| 6. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not respond to communications without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, poverty or illiteracy of my race. | |
| 7. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race, gender, age, or orientation. | |
| 8. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behaviour without being seen as a cultural outsider. | |
| 9. I can remain oblivious to the language and customs of persons of colour who constitute the world's majority without feeling, in my culture, any penalty for such oblivion. Further, the statutory holidays I get at work or school are holidays I celebrate. | |
| 10. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the person in charge, I will be presented a person of my race and gender. | |

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| | |
| 11. If I am stopped by the police or my taxes are audited, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race. | |
| 12. The music at my church reflects my cultural background. | |
| 13. I can easily buy posters, picture books, greeting cards, postcards, and children's magazines for myself and my family featuring people of our race. | |
| 14. I can take a job with an employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race. | |
| 15. I can choose public accommodations without fearing that people of my race will be mistreated in the places I have chosen or that I will have difficulty accessing the accommodations I've chosen. | |
| 16. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me. | |
| 17. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has connections to my race, gender, age, orientation or physical ability. | |
| 18. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in 'flesh' colour and have them more or less match my skin. | |
| 19. If I am asked to serve on a committee at church, I can be sure it isn't because of the colour of my skin. | |
| 20. My parents graduated from college or university. | |
| 21. The people in power in my city look and sound like me. | |
| 22. I can walk down the street with my partner anywhere in Canada without being afraid to hold hands. | |
| 23. I grew up with the understanding that I could do, or be, anything I wanted. | |

Total:

APPENDIX C

Resources (a brief list)

Cracking open White identity towards transformation: White identity, power and privilege
Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network, Canadian Council of Churches, 2012.

Mamow Be-Mo-Tay-Tah: Let us walk together
Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network, Canadian Council of Churches, 2009.

On the Doctrine of Discovery
by Dr. Néstor Medina, Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network, Canadian Council of Churches.

Truth and Reconciliation and the Doctrine of Discovery
Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network, Canadian Council of Churches.

Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People (3rd edition)
by Anne Bishop, Fernwood Publishing, 2015.

Beyond Token Change: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in Institutions
by Anne Bishop, Fernwood Publishing, 2005.

Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada
edited by Baldwin, Cameron & Kobayashi, University of British Columbia Press, 2011.

Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization
edited by Steve Heinrichs, Mennonite Church Canada, 2018.

<https://decolonizelutheranism.org/> decolonize Lutheranism

<https://www.womenoftheelca.org/ministry-action/justice/racial-justice-advocacy>
“How to have helpful conversations about race in the church” downloadable booklet

<http://www.interculturalleadership.ca/> Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning of the
Canadian Council of Churches

“White Privilege: The Elephant in the Room” by Deacon Richard Manley-Tannis
<https://www.united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/white-privilege-elephant-room>

“The Skin We're In” & “The Skin I'm In” by journalist Desmond Cole
<https://torontolife.com/city/life/skin-im-ive-interrogated-police-50-times-im-black/>
<http://www.cbc.ca/firsthand/episodes/the-skin-were-in>

“Your Privilege Is Showing” a TEDx talk by Lillian Medville
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4b_ojKx6UI&feature=youtu.be