

Racial Justice Listening Group

Pause and Refresh Handout

Sunday, November 15, 2020

ZOOM login: 867 718 0847 Passcode: 1776

Purpose: To share the work of the RJLG and invite people to join Forming Small Groups

The purpose of the Racial Justice Listening Group is to grow in Christian discipleship by discovering areas of racial bias in ourselves and identifying opportunities to promote racial justice in thought, word, and deed. The group has committed to the following:

1. *To pray for each other and the church.*
2. *To listen to others in the group as we share our personal stories.*
3. *To review resources that will help others engage in this work.*
4. *To listen to others as we open the door for these discussions.*
5. *To discern appropriate action steps for our church community.*

Members: Neal Axon (Moderator), Graham Wade, Lissa Long, Sarah Schumann, Meg Powell, Charlie Powell, Natasha Akery (Secretary), Daniel Smoak.

Report:

Commissioned by the Session, the RJLG has been meeting regularly for several months, praying together, listening to each other's stories, interviewing various members of the congregation, reviewing resources, and considering options to achieve our stated purpose.

Westminster is a predominantly white congregation with commitment to mission in the community and around the world. Through the interviews, we have learned Westminster is politically diverse and has a wide variety of response to the racial tensions in Charleston and beyond. In fact, one national study we read concluded that white Christians are less motivated to address issues of race than they were a year ago. We expect those findings to be true at Westminster as well, but we view growing apathy as a pastoral concern and something to be overcome. While addressing racism may create discomfort, we believe it is a holy discomfort, for surely we have room for growth in heart and mind as we seek to follow Jesus as his disciples.

The Plan:

We will offer a rigorous 12-week curriculum, led by members of the RJLG, for those in the community who are interested in growing in Christian discipleship by discovering areas of racial bias in themselves and identifying opportunities to promote racial justice in thought, word, and deed. The curriculum, described below, is developed through resources available through our denomination and other reliable sources. Ideally, multiple groups may meet concurrently, but each group is relatively small (5-7 participants) in order to promote shared learning, vulnerability, and participation.

The class will begin the first week in January.

Our hope and prayer is that over time, this course may be offered multiple times, and leaders will be trained and developed through the course of the learning.

Possible outcomes of this course of study are: growth in personal discipleship; awareness of ways Westminster may demonstrate implicit bias in the various ministries of the church; a heightened intentionality about addressing matters of racial justice.

Class Options:

- Mondays, 7:30 - 8:30 p.m.
- Tuesdays, 10:30 – 11:30 a.m.
- I'm interested, but neither time is possible for me

Please indicate preference:

- In-person meetings
- ZOOM meetings

Classes begin the first week of January

Anxious to Talk About It: A 12 Week Study on Racial Justice

The curriculum is developed primarily from PCUSA's Facing Racism study and Carolyn Helsel's book, Anxious to Talk About It. It is supplemented with relevant video resources and designed for intimate small group settings.

Pause and Refresh: An Invitation to Join the Study

Members of the RJLG offer a < 45 minute (ZOOM) invitation to join the study, including: a description of the RJLG and their work, testimonies of "Why we should care," a brief introduction and description of the study, and instructions about how to sign up. The P&R will be recorded for future access.

Week 1: Orientation, Introductions, and Worship

After a centering moment of worship, the group will receive a "road map" of the study, establish some ground rules, and spend most of the time with introductions and responding to two questions: 1. What are some life experiences you've had to shape your thoughts about race and racism? 2. What do you hope to gain from this study?

Week 2: Biblical Imperative to Antiracism

The Bible provides a firm foundation and compelling imperative to engage in antiracist work. There are at least four different biblical themes that can ground and motivate antiracism. While we will read some selected texts, it is important to recognize that these themes are not confined to isolated verses. Rather, they are woven throughout the biblical witness.

(source: Facing Racism, Week 1)

Week 3: Envisioning a New Way of Life Together

As we strive to create a world that more closely reflects God's love of justice and diversity, it can be helpful to have a shared image to evoke our common hope. Two such images are the Beloved Community and the New Creation.

(source: Facing Racism, Week 2)

Week 4 PCUSA and Racial Reconciliation

Mission statements help us to remember who we are and what we are about. The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. also has a mission statement that appears in The Book of Order in a section entitled "The Mission of the Church." This section lists "The Great Ends of the Church," a concise statement of who we are and what we are about as a denomination.

(source: Facing Racism, Week 3)

Week 5: Racism 101

Having conversations about racial injustice is hard work. One of the difficulties is unspecific terminology. Words like "racism" and "racist" are used very loosely in common parlance. This creates a lot of opportunity for confusion, defensiveness, and unintended offense. In order to make conversation easier and more productive, let's begin with some shared definitions.

(source: Facing Racism, Week 4)

Week 6: Mid Course Check-In | White and Anxious

We begin with a mid-course check-in. What feelings are surfacing so far, and how are participants processing those feelings? Are we still leaning in or beginning to be defensive and/or withdrawn?

Carolyn Helsel's book *Anxious to Talk About It* is designed to promote healthy and faithful conversations about race among predominantly white congregations. The opening chapters explore influences that shape the way we think about race. (source: *Anxious to Talk About It*, Introduction and chapters 1&2)

Week 7: Mapping Racial Identity Development

Each of us comes to an understanding of our identity through a process. We'll explore the process and learn to articulate our own journey of racial understanding.

(source: *Anxious to Talk About It*, chapter 3)

Week 8: Listening to Different Stories about Race

Growth often happens in relationships as we hear each other's stories and develop compassion. We'll hear stories from the marginalized and listen for how the Spirit may evoke responses of grace.

(source: *Anxious to Talk About It*, chapter 4; *Before You Call* video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGu_xGBekpo); guest speaker)

Week 9: Expressing Gratitude

We all come to the table with a certain frame of reference for the conversation about race. Helsel suggests white people are best prepared to have meaningful conversations with hearts of gratitude.

(source: *Anxious to Talk About It*, chapter 5)

Week 10: Spiritual Practices for Race Talk

Talking about race is hard. Spiritual growth is a process. Helsel suggests there are spiritual disciplines specifically suited to help us on the journey.

(source: *Anxious to Talk About It*, chapter 6 and conclusion)

Week 11: Enduring Legacy of Racism in the US

While significant strides towards racial equality were made as a result of the Civil Rights Movement, the legacy of racism continues in the United States and has, in many ways, worsened in recent decades. Some historical societal structures that granted white people privileges and hindered people of color have diminished over time. Others, however, have had snowball effects that are difficult to stop and sometimes hard to recognize.

(source: *Facing Racism*, Week 5; *Holy Post: Race in America* video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGUwcs9qJXY>)

Week 12: Responding as a Community of Faith | Worship

The church, as a community of faith, constantly strives to achieve the kind of unity and fellowship that allows it to worship God in Jesus Christ as one – one in adoration, trust and love. Jesus' triumph over oppression and death gives us the keys to this unity through grace, confession, and repentance. Worship will focus on repentance, confession, and forgiveness.

(source: *Facing Racism*, Week 6)