

DISMANTLING RACISM DISCUSSION GUIDE

LOOKING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD

BY THE REV. ANDY OLIVER (HE/HIM/HIS)

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RELIGION & RACE
The United Methodist Church

OPENING PRAYER

Creative One, open our hearts, our minds, and our awareness of our interconnectedness. Fill us with desire for listening for your will and living it out with courage. Turn us from our oppressive habits, and deepen our understanding, that we may choose paths of transformation and together building the world you desire. Amen.

INTRODUCING THE DISCUSSION

 [WATCH THE CONVERSATION](#)

- **Dr. Lisa Dellinger**, a pastor with the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference of The United Methodist Church and expert in racism, the Doctrine of Discovery, and the history of Native American Peoples, opens the conversation talking about how European settlers to North America viewed Indigenous peoples and its relationship to the Christian Church.
- General Secretary of the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History, the **Rev. Fred Day III**, then confronts both the pride and shame of the Methodist Church's involvement in the racial dynamics of the U.S. and why it is important that United Methodists know that history.
- The **Rev. Dr. Bobby McClain** (1938-2020), a United Methodist pastor and author of *Black People in the Methodist Church*, then shares pillars of racism that must be dismantled in the Church.
- **Dr. Alison Greene**, an expert in United States religious history, then teaches about theologies of white supremacy and racial violence.
- **Erin Hawkins**, moderator

SCRIPTURE

PHILIPPIANS 2:9-13 (INCLUSIVE BIBLE TRANSLATION)

God highly exalted Christ and gave to Jesus the name above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God: Jesus Christ reigns supreme!

Therefore, my dear friends, you who are always obedient to my urging, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, not only when I happen to be with you, but all the more now that I'm absent. It is God at work in you that creates the desire to do God's will.

DEVOTION/REFLECTION

The Apostle Paul sends his hopes to a new community of disciples who are trying to live out the mission of liberation given to them by Jesus. This panel discussion similarly shares a vision of where God is calling The United Methodist Church to go next to work for liberation of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people who have historically been marginalized, especially in our churches.

"Freedom doesn't just show up; we go in search of it," says Erin Hawkins, moderator of the panel discussion. Likewise, Paul says collective liberation is something that must be worked for. When we proclaim that Jesus is Lord or that Jesus reigns supreme, we are also saying that "whiteness" or other forms of racist idolatry is not Lord—that white supremacy is not compatible with the way of Jesus.

Speaking out requires risk. When we take an honest inventory of our individual, church, denomination, and country's response to the oppression of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, white people have all too often been silent. When white people allow systems of harm and violence to continue against our siblings of color, we betray the good news we proclaim and lose our humanity as well.

Another way to think about salvation is a salve that heals and liberates. In this current moment, perhaps working out our collective salvation looks like tearing down the vestiges of white supremacy. If we don't, we betray the very gospel we proclaim.

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SEASONED LEADERS

BY THE REV. HANNAH TERRY

Executive Director, FAM Houston
Community Pastor, Westbury United Methodist Church, Houston TX



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OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and Holy God, you sent Jesus Christ to be with us that we might know you and the goodness of being accompanied by you—open our hearts and minds by the power of the Holy Spirit that we might be changed through this conversation and learn to faithfully accompany our neighbors. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

INTRODUCING THE DISCUSSION

 [WATCH THE CONVERSATION](#)

Town Hall panelists include **Clara Ester, the Rev. James Lawson, Bishop Joel N. Martinez** and **Sue Thrasher**, alongside **Erin Hawkins** as moderator. Four experienced leaders discuss how God calls the people called Methodists today to lean into their own conversion and sanctification by actively engaging the work of dismantling racism within the life of the congregation and public square.

SCRIPTURE

JOHN 18:12-27 (THE INCLUSIVE BIBLE)

Then the cohort and its captain and the Temple guards seized and bound Jesus. They took him first to Annas. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Temple authorities that it was better to have one person die on behalf of the people. Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. This disciple, who was known to the high priest, entered his courtyard with Jesus, while Peter hung back at the gate. So the disciple known to the high priest went back and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter inside. The doorkeeper said, "Aren't you one of this guy's followers?" But Peter answered, "No, I'm not."

Now the night was cold, so the attendants and guards had lit a charcoal fire and were warming themselves. Peter was with them as well, keeping warm. The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teachings. Jesus answered, "I have spoken publicly to everyone; I have always taught in synagogues and in the Temple area where the whole Jewish

people congregates. I have said nothing in secret. So why do you question me? Ask those who have heard me. Ask them what I said to them—they know what I said." When Jesus said this, one of the guards standing by slapped him and said, "Is this how you answer the high priest?" "If I've said anything wrong," Jesus replied, "point it out; but if I'm right in what I said, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him, still shackled, to Caiaphas the high priest. Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. Others asked him, "Aren't you one of his disciples?" But Peter denied it, saying, "I am not!" One of the attendants of the high priest, a relative of the attendant whose ear Peter had severed, spoke up: "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it. At that moment a rooster crowed.

DEVOTION/REFLECTION

Simon Peter shows us what it looks like when our desire for self-preservation drives the bus and fear contorts the human spirit toward violence. Toward seeing another human sibling as disposable. We stand in the courtyard, cross our arms, stare into the charcoal fire and say—*I don't know her. I don't know him. Nope, don't know them, and we don't belong to each other. We deny the Imago Dei—the image of God—the very presence of Jesus Christ among us.*

As a white cisgender woman with the power and privileges of ordination in our denomination, my first—and continuous—step in dismantling racism is practicing prayerful self-examination every day. I must take a hard and honest look at how I relate to Peter. At how I abandon Christ. At how I passively participate in our church's systems and our national social ordering that values white bodies more than Black and Brown bodies.

I must acknowledge the ways I cross my arms and look blankly into the charcoal fire while silently thinking—*I'll grieve here on my own and offer up more thoughts and prayers because there's really nothing else I can do at the moment about yet again another trans Black woman being murdered in Houston.* I must daily recommit to practicing spiritual disciplines that shift my heart and mind and body by the transforming grace and love of God—grace and love that requires me to align my time, values, habits, language, financial investments, and relationships with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- **Rev. Lawson said, “Not only The United Methodist Church but Christianity as a whole has to re-examine the forms of Christianity that have been taught and practiced.”** (WATCH: 22:27 - 22:50)

How do Rev. Lawson’s comments stir you? What troubles you? Where are you sensing the Holy Spirit inviting you to slow down, listen, and re-learn the story of God and the stories of Christianity?

- **Bishop Martinez said, “Unless we are willing to go off the map, off the terrain we are comfortable in, we will not be empowered to work for the kind of future [God desires] ...and call of the church for this time.”** (WATCH: 36:07 - 36:50)

What would need to change within you so you could go off the map into the uncomfortable terrain of dismantling white supremacy— terrain that leads to God’s desired future for the church and for the world?

- **Sue Thrasher said, “When you wake up every morning you have to consciously think about what you are going to do today to leave the world in a little bit better of a place than it was before. You can’t coast just because you have been involved in something. You have to keep finding the answers.”** (WATCH: 41:45 - 42:08)

What are some changes you can make today to your morning or daily routine to center you in the transforming love of God and the work of self-examination?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: WATCH, LISTEN, EXPLORE

OUR CONGREGATION GLADLY SCRAMBLED TO HELP DURING THE TEXAS WINTER STORM. BUT WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO DO IT AGAIN.

Galveston Central Church—a United Methodist congregation situated on the Gulf Coast of Texas—was hit hard by Winter Storm Uri in February 2021. Pastors Michael Gienger and Julia Riley reflect on inequities revealed by the storm and how the church must practice self-examination and repentance. Read this article and pray about ways your church might relate to Galveston Central Church and how God calls you to take the next step with your own reflection, self-examination, and confession in your own church and neighborhood contexts.

 [READ THE ARTICLE](#)

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE?

Transformative Justice is a movement of building communities that encourage accountability, mediate conflict, and prevent, respond to, and minimize harm. While not rooted in The United Methodist Church, this work reflects practices that the church needs to embody to be faithful to Christ and equip people for life together in Christian community. Watch this introductory video and listen for ways Transformative Justice offers you concrete steps to dismantle racism and can help you grow in love with God and your neighbor.

 [WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

EVERYDAY PRACTICES OF TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

This video offers a glimpse into community practices that develop skills for communication, generative conflict, and accountability. We must build spiritual muscle memory to repair relationships and reorder our world in alignment with the Gospel. As you watch this video, pay attention to the connections between transformative justice, the gospel, and ways the connections spark your imagination for next steps in preventing violence, intervening in violence, and supporting one another in the aftermath of violence.

 [WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

WE ARE NEVER ALONE

Pancho Argüelles practices the lifelong way of accompaniment thanks to his time in the mountains of Mexico learning from Christians who lived and loved like Jesus. Pancho says that “accompaniment, particularly with communities that have experienced the trauma of oppression and marginalization, is a process that starts by acknowledging the full humanity and dignity of the people we want to accompany.” As you read Pancho’s story, ask God to reveal your next steps in learning accompaniment as you seek to do anti-racism work in Christian community.

 [READ THE ARTICLE](#)

DISMANTLING RACISM

**Dismantling Racism is an initiative of
The United Methodist Church.**

[LEARN MORE.](#)

This resource was designed with a United Methodist perspective, but we believe that the content is also relevant for non-UMC seekers who are doing anti-racism work with a spiritual foundation.

 Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.
The people of The United Methodist Church®

DISMANTLING RACISM DISCUSSION GUIDE

EMERGING LEADERS: CREATING AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

BY ANDRES DE ARCO

Harvard Divinity '23
National Assistant Director, Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy



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OPENING PRAYER

God. Allow us to see our humanity as tied to those whom we have been taught to dismiss, overlook, and even demonize. I call on you, O God, to eradicate the spirit of fear that fills the seats of our sanctuaries and ruminates the spaces of our minds and hearts. Allow the kingdom to be held accountable to your call and likeness. May this discussion be of fruit and generate new beginnings, understandings, and movements. En tu nombre oramos, Amen.

INTRODUCING THE DISCUSSION

 [WATCH THE CONVERSATION](#)

- Ann Jacob
- The Rev. Theon Johnson III, Ph.D.
- Andres De Arco
- Katelin Hansen, Ph.D.
- Erin Hawkins, moderator

SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 23: 23-24 (THE INCLUSIVE BIBLE)

Woe to you religious scholars and you Pharisees, you frauds! You pay your tithes on mint, dill and cumin while neglecting the weightier matters of the Law—justice, mercy and faithfulness! These you should have practiced, without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out gnats, but swallow camels in the process!

DEVOTION/REFLECTION

As a life-long United Methodist, I am constantly challenged to live out the call of making disciples for Jesus Christ. This passage, however, serves as a constant reminder of just how radical of a mission this is. It is at times difficult for me to picture an indignant Jesus getting in the face of highly respected religious leadership and unapologetically calling out their hypocrisy. But what is equally unsettling is that thousands of years later, the expectation Jesus has placed toward

his followers has not changed. Jesus shows me in this moment that the battles we confront as Christians are not always fought with an agreeable demeanor. Rather, he reminds us that the path towards justice is never on neutral grounds. At some point, our walk with Christ will absolutely oblige us to face Pharisees head on and call them for who and what they are.

Today, we face long-standing Pharisees in the form of racist systems. Speaking candidly, as a Black person living in the U.S., I worry that my skin color can one day become part of my own demise. I worry that I will join the insufferably long list of those whose skin has been an invitation to brutalization. I also worry, however, that the very Christians to whom I'm tied in this call, will remain silent in the face of my suffering. This call to walk with Christ is not one that requires perfection, but it demands courage and repudiates neutrality. We as a community, when facing the Pharisees of the system of racism, must be willing to hold ourselves to nothing less than the standard Jesus has shown us, no matter how unpopular. It is our life-long duty.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can we begin creating an infrastructure of accountability within our places of worship?
- Where do we find the most resistance/pushback when confronting racist systems in our faith communities?
- Where have we personally fallen short in our quest for racial justice?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: WATCH, LISTEN, TAKE ACTION

HOW TO BE AN ANTIRACIST BY IBRAM X. KENDI

This best-selling book provides a vision for how we may walk in a manner that actively seeks to challenge the internalized racism/racial bias we hold as individuals and as a community. For those interested in engaging in the journey towards anti-racism, this book is a great way to start.



[LISTEN TO THE AUDIOBOOK](#)

DISMANTLING RACISM DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE THEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF COLONIALISM AND RACISM

BY THE REV. NATHAN ADAMS

Lead Pastor, Park Hill United Methodist Church, Denver, Colorado



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OPENING PRAYER

Holy One who creates us All in Your own image.
Help us to believe this.
Help us to remember this.
Help us to fight for this.
May our identities be rooted in you and
the way you have created us.
In Christ's holy name, Emmanuel, we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCING THE DISCUSSION

 [WATCH THE CONVERSATION](#)

Panelists include **Dr. Mai-Anh Le Tran**, the Rev. **Edgardo Colón--Emeric**, and **Dr. Willie James Jennings**.

If we as Christians are called to "love our neighbors," why do we see such racism within our religious communities and structures? Why does racism abound within the United States and across the world? How are our various identities tied up in all of this? Listen as we discuss and explore our true identity.

 [READ THE SUPPORTING ARTICLE](#)

SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 1:27 (THE INCLUSIVE BIBLE)

Humankind was created as God's reflection: in the divine image God created them; female and male, God made them.

DEVOTION/REFLECTION

Standing in the church office where I pastored several years ago, my staff member recounted the racism she experienced growing up in Jamaica. It came from her friends and family who, like her, were of African descent. She was singled out because her skin was too dark. She was treated differently, called names, and excluded from activities.

Growing up with three siblings, I related. I remember comparing our own brown arms to one another. Our comparison game was innocent enough; name calling and exclusion weren't part of it.

However, looking back, I cringe.

At a young age, we had figured out that the darkness of our complexions made a difference in how people treated us. We'd learned the lesson that lighter is better. Therefore, if I'm lighter, I'm better.

It wasn't lost on my siblings nor my staff member that the racism we were experiencing was often perpetrated by fellow Christians.

This is underscored in the panel, "The Theological Roots of Colonialism and Racism." For far too long, whiteness and the systems associated with it and Christianity have been intertwined with one another. From this perspective we have learned our own identity, whatever it might be.

Except our true identity rests not in whiteness, but in God.

From the very first pages of the Bible, we see that humanity (all of it) has been created in the image of God. This is our true identity. This identity, this sacredness, is bestowed upon us without merit simply by being created by God. Our identity (and that of others) must be that we are a person created in the image of God and thus of sacred worth. Are we living that out?

How might my staff member's childhood have been different if so? Mine? Yours?

Let's get to it.

DISMANTLING RACISM DISCUSSION GUIDE

VOTER SUPPRESSION

BY THE REV. APRIL CASPERSON

*Director of Diversity and Inclusion,
West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church*



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OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, we are in a polarizing season in the life of the United States. Help us to better understand how our votes matter. Push us into a life of faith that supports the rights of all people. Amen.

INTRODUCING THE DISCUSSION

 [WATCH THE CONVERSATION AND READ THE SUPPORTING COMMENTARY](#)

Rep. Emmanuel Cleaver II and Erin Hawkins speak about the intersections between faith, race and voting suppression.

SCRIPTURE

JEREMIAH 29: 4-7 (THE INCLUSIVE BIBLE)

Thus says YHWH Omnipotent, the God of Israel, to all the exiles I deported from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses to live in. Plant gardens and eat what they grow. Marry and raise daughters and sons. Find wives for your sons and husbands for your daughters, that they may bear daughters and sons. Multiply while you are there. Do not decrease. Rather, seek the peace and the prosperity of the city to which I exiled you. Pray to YHWH for it, for if it prospers, you will prosper.

DEVOTION/REFLECTION

Voter suppression is a topic that some say is separate from our faith. However, God's preferential care for those who do not have voice is found throughout the biblical narrative. God often instructs God's people to "take up space" – to have a voice, to speak on behalf of the voiceless, and to ensure that all have what they need.

Jeremiah 29 outlines the specific directives God gives God's people when they are in exile: create a home, establish roots, and trust God while seeking health and wholeness for the place they are in. Voting – along with all acts of civic duty – is a form of seeking the peace and prosperity of the places we live in. Voter suppression is the act of taking away voice from the residents in an area, removing their agency and ability to make an impact on their community.

Voter suppression is a topic that has been present in the United States for generations and the issue did not disappear with the previous presidential election. Consider who in your community is being kept from the polls. What is your role as a person of faith in ensuring that all people have the ability to seek the peace and prosperity of their community?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does Jeremiah's letter to the exiles say about engaging with the community in which they live?
- What does it mean to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you...?"
- Do you see any connections between voting, civic engagement and "living fully in one's community?"

DISMANTLING RACISM DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTERSECTIONALITY

BY SOPHIA AGTARAP, DEACONESS

*Director of Equity and Language Services,
Sumner-Bonney Lake School District, Sumner, WA*



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OPENING PRAYER

God of multitude - who continues to invite us to be in community with your creation:

Call us to love the diversity we represent as we reflect your likeness. Stir in us a deep discontent and restlessness for calls for unity that seek to suppress each one's unique voice, body, experience, and expression of belovedness. Embolden us into spaces where each of these expressions are seen, valued, restored, and where we are reminded that all you created is good. Amen.

INTRODUCING THE DISCUSSION

 [WATCH THE CONVERSATION](#)

In anti-racism work, it can be tempting to focus only on fighting racial injustice, as we can fall into the trap of reducing anti-racism work into a silo. However, injustice is intersectional, and liberation is interconnected. **Miguel A. De La Torre**, **Traci C. West** and **Erin Hawkins** explore historical ways in which we have partitioned off justice work without an awareness of intersectionality as they explore the joy and hope around community and coalition building.

 [READ THE ARTICLE](#)

SCRIPTURE

EXODUS 1:15-2:10 (THE INCLUSIVE BIBLE)

Pharaoh spoke to the midwives of the Hebrews—one was Shiphrah, and the other Puah—and said, “When you assist the Hebrew women in childbirth, examine them on the birthing-stool. If the baby is a boy, kill it. If it is a girl, let it live.” But the midwives were God-fearing women, and they ignored the Pharaoh’s instructions, and let the male babies live. So Pharaoh summoned the midwives and asked why they let the male babies live. The midwives responded, “These Hebrew women are different from Egyptian women; they are more robust, and deliver even before the midwife arrives.” God rewarded the midwives, and the people increased in numbers and in power. And since the midwives were God-fearing, God gave them families of their own. The Pharaoh then commanded all those in Egypt, “Let every boy that is born to the Hebrews be thrown into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

There was a man from the house of Levi who had married a Levite woman, and she conceived and gave birth to a boy. And she saw that the baby was good, so she hid it for three months. When she could hide the baby no longer she took a papyrus basket, daubed it with bitumen and pitch, and put the child in it, and placed the basket among the reeds by the banks of the Nile. The baby’s sister watched from a distance to learn what would happen. Pharaoh’s daughter came down to the Nile to bathe, while her attendants walked along the river bank. She noticed the basket among the reeds, and sent her attendant to fetch it. Opening it, she saw the baby—and how it wept! She was moved to pity and said, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children!” Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Do you want me to go and find a nurse for you among the Hebrews to suckle the child for you?” “Yes, go,” she answered. So the sister went off and brought the baby’s own mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child with you and suckle it for me, and I myself will pay you.” The woman took the child and nursed it. After the child was weaned, she brought it to Pharaoh’s daughter, who adopted it as her own. She called him Moses—“He Who Pulls Out”—for she said, “I pulled him out of the water.”

DEVOTION/REFLECTION

There are powerful and violent forces that shape our lives in ways we feel we cannot control, and powerhungry leaders in positions of power outside our spheres of influence. They may not be called Pharaoh, but we see the violence echoed in this narcissistic behavior where decisions are based not on what is best for the people, but in response to powerful and often competing interests. We see this play out as communities are being further pushed to the margins out of sight, as Black, Brown, Indigenous, people of color, and trans persons are brutalized, with their literal breath extinguished.

As modern-day people of faith, we might find ourselves reading this passage from Exodus simply as an empowering story of women taking a stand to save the lives of thousands of baby boys.

But this story isn't just about women - or even midwives.

It is a story about all of us as we consider our overlapping and intersecting identities as we co-create, birth, and usher in new worlds and possibilities where these identities are not seen as threats, but as gifts to the world—reflections of a creative God who does not make mistakes.

We are midwives.

As we reflect our multitudinous God, we are invited in all of our expressions as God's beloved, to resist evil and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves, and work against those powers that destroy human potential and thriving.

We cannot opt out of all the systems of power that seek to marginalize and other, but we can make choices, just like the midwives and Pharaoh's daughter did.

May God be with us as we interrogate these systems of power that deny God's people of visibility and belongingness and move toward a more intersectional and collaborative approach to dismantling white supremacy and racism, as we work together to create God's beloved community.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The Rev. Dr. Traci C. West invites us to think about the ways intersectionality is less about our identities and more about issues of power. Rather than begin with "I am..." statements, we are invited to consider the systems of power and the ways in which those systems operate in multiple ways at the same time, and how our identities are associated with those systems.

- **What are some of those systems of power that you have noticed or are a part of?**
- **In what ways is Christianity a system of power that we are invited to interrogate? How does it work in collaboration with other systems of power?**
- **It is a common approach to be siloed or insular in our understandings of oppression, which as the speakers named, is a function of white supremacy. What are ways that you (whether through your congregation, organizations, etc.) might begin moving toward a more intersectional and collaborative approach to dismantling white supremacy and racism?**
- **If we believe that God made all of creation good and diverse in God's image and we are called to reflect, uphold, honor that Imago Dei, perhaps a starting point for us could be to ask the following questions to center our work: Who is the most vulnerable in my community? How are they targeted? What are the consequences of my indifference? In other words, how are we perpetrators to violence and marginalization? Who am I, or who are we accountable to when we consider ministries and outreach and our relationships with these communities?**

DISMANTLING RACISM

"It is a story about all of us as we consider our overlapping and intersecting identities..."

- Sophia Agtarap

