



Becoming Beloved Community: Here and Now

A LENTEN STUDY

Developed by the Commission to
Dismantle Racism and Discrimination

WNY&NWPA
EPISCOPAL

A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveler, not even fools,
shall go astray.

No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast
come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

And the ransomed of the Lord
shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing
shall flee away.

Isaiah 35:8-10
THIRD WEEK OF LENT

SESSION ONE

Introduction: The “What?” Why are we here?

OPENING PRAYER

For The Human Family

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 815

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.

OBJECTIVE

Our objective for this session:

In coming together and in gathering, we hope to inspire deeper, collective reflection, discernment, and discovery.

BACKGROUND

The Resolution that commissioned this program calls for an adaptive change process.

See additional documents.

- Adaptive Change is used for issues that are Complex, Messy, Unpredictable
- Issues for which there is no quick fix or technical solution
- Issues that require deep, long-term change – like changing long held assumptions and implicit values
- Issues that require learning in new ways
- Issues that cannot be resolved top-down

QUESTIONS

Change is often difficult.

- What changes have you seen in your own congregation and the Episcopal Church?
- How do you think that people in your church deal with change?

We recognize that the real process of moving toward racial healing and justice will unfold at the congregation level, with people like you.

HOW WE BEGIN

- **What?** Acknowledge the Church's past participation and complicity with racism.
- **So, what?** Explore the legacy of this history for us today.
- **Now what?** Collaborate to generate next step ideas; one size doesn't fit all; there are many paths along this journey, more than one way.

HISTORY

Some history of “the Church” to look at and reflect upon:

Since the late 15th century, Western Christianity has been influenced by the Doctrine of Discovery. (For more information about the Doctrine of Discovery, visit:

upstanderproject.org/learn/guides-and-resources/first-light/doctrine-of-discovery

- Papal Bull which formalized the idea of the superiority of European Christians, was used to justify the colonization of non-Christians
- To take control of their land, property and lives, including slavery and the Indigenous genocide in this county
- Functioned as a foundational philosophy for racism and understanding difference through the presumption of white superiority

The Church of England, and later The Episcopal Church in the colonies, was very much a part of this practice.

- In 1965, an application on behalf of the son of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was rejected by the Lovett School, an Episcopal day school, based on unanimously adopted school guidelines that prohibited African American students
- In 2021, The Episcopal Church released the results of the Racial Justice Audit of Episcopal Leadership that identified nine patterns of structural racism. According to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, this gives us “a real picture of the dynamics and reality of structural and institutional racism among us.” In the words of one church leader of color, racism “is always in the room.”

QUESTIONS

What events have happened in the communities around our Partnership that indicated to you that we need to look at racial healing and justice?

What events have happened in the communities around our Partnership that indicate to you that racial healing and justice have already begun?

Where do you think that your church is in this process and why?

What stories would you like to share from your own personal experiences?

CLOSING PRAYER *from Guerillas of Grace, Social Justice Resource Center; used with permission*

Lord, Jesus Christ who reached across the ethnic boundaries between Samaritan, Roman and Jew, who offered fresh sight to the blind and freedom to captives: help us to break down the barriers in our community, enable us to see the reality of racism and bigotry, and free us to challenge and uproot it from ourselves, our society and our world. Amen.

SESSION TWO

Now That We Are Here: “So What?”

OPENING PRAYER

For Social Justice

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 823

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart [and especially the hearts of the people of this land], that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OBJECTIVE

Our objective for this session:

To think more deeply about how the church's past complicity with racism influences the way we "are church" today and what the wider church has done in response to this

BACKGROUND

"Church," in a big, wide, comprehensive way, includes everything from our buildings and physical *presence*, to how we worship, to how we live the Gospel, and how we are with one another and in community.

QUESTIONS

Take a look at your own church. How is your church set up?

What is there in your church that speaks to inclusion (for women, for people of color, for the indigenous people, for LGBTQIA+ community and others) and what does not?

Where in your church will people see images of themselves and not?

How do your worship services (music, prayers, communion, seating arrangements and others) speak to inclusion and what does not?

What other aspects of your communal life as a church speak to inclusion and what does not?

HOW WE BEGIN

- **What?** Acknowledge the Church's past participation and complicity with racism.
- **So, what?** Explore the legacy of this history for us today.
- **Now what?** Collaborate to generate next step ideas; one size doesn't fit all; there are many paths along this journey, more than one way.

HISTORY

What has the Church done so far?

The Church of England, and later The Episcopal Church in the colonies, was very much part of this. The good news: After years of partial steps, including the Church's adoption of anti-lynching resolution in 1919,

- In 1991, declared racism a sin and called on all baptized members of the Church to work to remove racism from the life of the Nation, for we can make no peace with oppression.
- In 2006, acknowledged the church's past complicity with racism and institution of slavery
- In 2009, the Church renounced the Doctrine of Discovery as fundamentally opposed to the Gospel
- In 2015, the Church affirmed the call to pray and work for racial justice and reconciliation, and created the Becoming Beloved Community initiative as a way to respond to racial injustice
- These initiatives have been renewed and expanded in successive General Conventions

During the Civil Rights Movement:

- The "Southern Project" gave aid to local church activist groups in support of their work for desegregation.
- The Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, a forerunner to UBE (Union of Black Episcopalians), organized sit-ins at segregated churches and protested segregated church schools and institutions.
- A group of 15 clergy made a pilgrimage from New Orleans to convention in Detroit and were arrested along the way for agitating against church and school segregation.
- Local clergy participated in voter registrations and civil rights protests.
- In 1963, Presiding Bishop Arthur Lichtenberger issued a "Whitsunday Statement" committing the Episcopal Church to maximum participation in the civil rights movement. The statement had a profound impact on the Church. Many interpreted it as the Church's sanction of direct action against segregation. The Episcopal Church participated in the planning of the March on Washington D.C. for Jobs and Freedom. Observers at the march estimated more than half of the banners and signs were from churches, synagogues, and related agencies and organizations.

Source and more information at episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/timeline-church

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

Racism is Discrimination, inequality and disparities – think about education, redlining and housing, healthcare and maternal mortality, and wealth accumulation.

- When focused on Racism, we see the outcomes but the values and assumptions of a white focused culture is what drives society; explains and justifies the way racism reestablishes itself time and time again – slavery was abolished – then came segregation and Jim Crow laws – when there was progress on voting and civil rights, white-focused culture reemerged as mass incarceration and the new Jim Crow.
- White-focused culture provides the motivations and justifications for continued forms of systemic racism and discrimination.
- For more information on Jim Crow Laws, go to www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws

QUESTIONS

Can you highlight a few values and assumptions of white-focused culture that make the ministry of racial healing and reconciliation difficult and prevents us from truly seeing every life as sacred?

Can you highlight a few ways in which we have seen the inequities of a white-focused culture play out? How has that happened? Why do you think this has happened?

CLOSING PRAYER *From Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)*

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which Christ's
compassion is to look out to the world.
Yours are the feet with which Christ is to
go about doing good.
Yours are the hands with which Christ is
to bless all people now.

SESSION THREE

Becoming Beloved Community, Part 1

OPENING PRAYER

For Peace

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 815

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

OBJECTIVE

Our objective for the next two sessions:

To take a closer look at the Episcopal Church's "Becoming Beloved Community" initiative and see if there are ways in which we can incorporate this into our communal life in the Diocesan Partnership and in our own churches

Refer to: episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community

Written in 2017; Updated in 2020 and 2021. See website for more detailed information on "Becoming Beloved Community."

BACKGROUND

In the previous session, we highlighted Becoming Beloved Community as the work of the Episcopal Church in racial reconciliation. Sessions Three and Four highlight some of the aspects of this work.

- The four quadrants of the "Becoming Beloved Community" are centered around a labyrinth. A labyrinth is an ancient spiritual tool to help bring about contemplation and spiritual transformation. The walking of a labyrinth has no real beginning and no end. The journey is never ending because each end brings about a new beginning. This is reflective of the work that we do on dismantling racism and discrimination. Each end part of our journey is the beginning of a new journey. The work and discussions we have now are not an end, but a new beginning towards a continual journey of "loving our neighbors as ourselves."

BACKGROUND, cont.

Reference: episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community

- “The Episcopal Church’s work toward racial reconciliation, healing and justice is guided by the long-term commitment to Becoming Beloved Community. We organize our ministries around the four quadrants of the labyrinth. Each quadrant represents a commitment that is vital to lasting change within us, our churches, our communities and society at large.”

TRUTH-TELLING: Telling the Truth about Our Churches and Race

PROCLAMATION: Proclaiming the Dream of Beloved Community

FORMATION: Practicing Jesus’ Way of Healing Love

JUSTICE: Repairing the Breach in Society and Institutions

- Jesus laid out the most basic Christian teaching of all when the young man asked him, “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He told him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40) The Beloved Community is the body within which all people can grow to love God and love the image of God that we find in our neighbors, in ourselves, and in creation. It provides a positive, theologically and biblically based ideal that orients the work of racial healing, reconciliation, and justice. It is the end toward which the Jesus Movement points.”

Source: episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community

QUESTIONS

We will now look at some of the baptismal promises in *The Book of Common Prayer* (p. 304-305).

Look at the following baptismal promises and discuss how this relates to each of the four quadrants (Truth Telling, Proclaiming, Formation, and Justice) of Becoming Beloved Community.

Labyrinth diagram and resources: episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community

1. Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
2. Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
3. Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
4. Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?

Such discussion may include, but are not limited to discussions on:

- What racial/cultural/ethnic groups are in our Church? Why is that and are there some that are excluded? Talk also about your community.
- How does our community serve people of different racial/cultural/ethnic groups?
- What would need to change for us to foster the Beloved Community where we live and worship?

“Because we assume scarcity, we cannot imagine equality.”

Attributed to Thelma Jean Grossholtz, professor emeritus of politics and women's studies at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA, and activist, who died in 1921.

- What do you think of this quote?
- What might we be doing differently if we were to foster a community of seeking Christ in each other and in our neighbors?
- How might we become examples for our children to learn from?
- How can we support systems that support unity and inclusion? What, or how do you think our churches might make changes to support unity and inclusion?
- How might we work towards dismantling Institutional racism?*

CLOSING PRAYER *Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia, on the Social Justice Resource Center; used with permission*

One God, in Three Persons, creator of one human species, in many hues: all who pray to you are descendants of Adam and Eve, all members of one race called “human.”

Forgive the blindness that causes our eyes to notice and magnify those things we regard as different from ourselves in others. Teach us to see clearly, that we, your children, are far more alike than we are different. Help us to put aside the racial prejudices embedded within us, and to see within every person the Child of God you created, our sister or brother, destined for Glory. In the name of One who died for all persons, of all colors, Jesus Christ. Amen.

SESSION FOUR

Becoming Beloved Community, Part 2

OPENING PRAYER

For The Church

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 816

Gracious Father, we pray for the holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth, and with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ your Son, our Savior. Amen.

OBJECTIVE

Refer to Session Three for Objective, Background, and Questions, to continue discussion.

CLOSING PRAYER *prayer by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., on socialjusticeresourcecenter.org/prayers/racism/*

When our eyes do not see the gravity of racial injustice,
Shake us from our slumber and open our eyes, O Lord.
When out of fear we are frozen into inaction,
Give us a spirit of bravery, O Lord.
When we try our best but say the wrong things,
Give us a spirit of humility, O Lord.
When the chaos of this dies down,
Give us a lasting spirit of solidarity, O Lord.
When it becomes easier to point fingers outward,
Help us to examine our own hearts, O Lord.
God of truth, in your wisdom, Enlighten Us.
God of love, in your mercy, Forgive Us.
God of hope in your kindness, Heal Us.
Creator of All People, in your generosity, Guide Us.
Racism breaks your heart,
break our hearts for what breaks yours, O Lord.
Ever present God, you called us to be in relationship with one another and promised to dwell wherever two or three are gathered. In our community, we are many different people; we come from many different places, have many different cultures. Open our hearts that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion and the treasures of diversity among us. We pray in faith. Amen.

SESSION FIVE

“Now What?” Imagining Next Steps

OPENING PRAYER

For Guidance

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 832

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OBJECTIVE

Our objective for this session:

To find ways to begin where we are and take small steps that build toward real change – change that transforms how we are with one another, in community and spirituality with God

“To bring about change, you must not be afraid to take the first step.
We will fail when we fail to try.” *Rosa Parks*

HOW WE BEGAN

- **What?** Acknowledge the Church’s past participation and complicity with racism.
- **So, what?** Explore the legacy of this history for us today.
- **Now what?** Collaborate to generate next step ideas; one size doesn’t fit all; there are many paths along this journey, more than one way.

QUESTIONS

What do you think stops us from taking the steps towards the work of racial reconciliation and justice?

What is it about how we think about dismantling racism that “steers us off course”?

PLEDGE

Introduce the Pledge of Faith and Action against Racial Injustice

See the Additional Documents section at the end of this curriculum.

I acknowledge and promise to reject injustice stemming from racism within my thoughts or actions.

I will commit to accomplishing one or more acts of reconciliation as I reflect upon practices aligned with Jesus and beloved community.

I will turn from the powers of sin, hatred, fear, injustice and oppression toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice, and freedom.

Discuss the Pledge of Faith and Action against Racial Injustice

What do you think would change if we all took this pledge of faith and action against racial injustice?

How would we “church” differently?

What do you think would keep us all from taking this pledge?

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” *Martin Luther King Jr.*

LEARN, PRAY, ACT

Introduce “Learn, Pray, Act”

See the Additional Documents section at the end of this curriculum.

“Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression”

Discuss ways to “Learn, Pray, Act”

Look at each of the columns and talk about what areas you think that you, your Church, or Community might want to begin.

These steps may be adding a prayer to your Sunday worship for the work of racial reconciliation and justice.

Choose a book from the suggested list and forming a book study group.

Plan a group trip to the Underground Railroad in Niagara Falls or the Seneca Nation Museum in Salamanca, NY.

Find another church or group in your community to partner with for a book study or another program suggested in “Wondering what to do to dismantle Racism?”

Read the letter on the following page, from Dr. Gabrie’l Atchison.

An excerpt from “An Open Letter to White Clergy”

By Dr. Gabriele Atchison *used with permission*

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:39-43

On Saturday, May 14, 2022, I started to receive texts, calls and Facebook messages from family and friends asking me if I was safe. There had been a shooting in Buffalo. Those of us who live, work, and pray in the suburbs surrounding Buffalo, marked ourselves as ‘safe’ from gun violence on that day.

The East Side of Buffalo is vibrant, and colorful, and loud – and in many ways typical of other predominately African American, urban communities – where the long-term impacts of racial and economic segregation and neglect are met with black resilience.

The week after the shooting, I would find myself visiting the site for various vigils and gatherings. I have not been to a war zone, but I imagine that this is how it must feel. There was an eerie hush. There was a heavy police presence everywhere. Groups lined the streets with (sometimes make-shift) donation stations to hand out free food and other supplies. The Tops Friendly Markets grocery store was an oasis in a food desert, and many recognized right away that there would be a need to get food to people in the area.

There was a team of comfort dogs and handlers deployed to the area... People were walking around aimlessly. One man was openly screaming, crying out ... There were news anchors, politicians and several members of the Buffalo Bills walking around. Staff persons from Starbucks handed out free coffee and snacks from a card table. A small storefront business was playing music from speakers and a few people stopped to dance.

The whole block surrounding the Tops Market was blocked off with police tape, and tributes formed around the edges – with colorful flowers, balloons, candles, stuffed animals, and ribbons. People wrote inspirational messages in sidewalk chalk, and someone left a note printed on yellow paper, which simply said “stop racism.”

This was a crazy mixture of a military zone, a defiant, celebratory, street-fair and a mass, black church funeral.

Perhaps the most staggering aspect of the mass shooting for me is that the person who caused all this pain was so young. It made me ask myself, “Why are white supremacists better able to reach youth and young adults than we are as the church?”

That young man believed that he could start a race war, because he didn’t understand the strength, resilience and love that reside within African American people. He also believes that you agree with him. He believes that I want to and can replace you – and that you will gain from my destruction. He was convinced that he was doing this horrible act for you. He is not a monster; he is another victim of white supremacy. And we are as responsible to him and his parents and his communities of hate as we are to the families of the victims at Tops. This young man is not alone, and this will not be the last massacre.

Racial segregation is not simply a desire to live among one's racial group; it is maintained and held in place with violence. The East Side neighborhoods of Buffalo are choked off from resources, jobs, adequate public transportation, fresh air, and fresh food. Segregation allowed a young white man to inflict the most damage on the African American community by researching zip codes.

Segregation is sin. White supremacy is the mechanism through which segregation is maintained and black suffering is permitted. Repentance is a turning away from sin.

The story of the thief on the cross teaches us that no matter how long you have been engaged in sin or how late you repent, Jesus will provide a place for you in God's kingdom.

My question for you, my white brothers and sisters and siblings in Christ is, how far are you willing to go to confront and remove white supremacy from your theology and church practices, and communities, and homes?

My suggestion is that you begin where you are. And start with yourself. With the deepest compassion allowed, find those spaces within yourself where you feel that white life is more valuable than the lives of people who are not white. Find spaces where you see whiteness as the standard-bearer or as 'normal' and others as different or undeserving. Look at these spaces and deconstruct the lies about your own supremacy – these are the essential first steps in liberating yourself and those in your care. Begin where you are, and start today!

Segregation is sin, but so is apathy. There is no need for perfection just a need for a commitment to doing what is right even if it is hard.

Begin where you are, and start today! AMEN

CLOSING PRAYER *prayer attributed to St Francis*

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.

Resolution: Framing the Journey

Resolution NY-E & PA-E Originator: Commission to Dismantle Racism and Discrimination

Subject: Framing the Journey to Beloved Community

Whereas, the Episcopal Diocese Commission to Dismantle Racism and Discrimination (CDRD) was established to: (1) promote greater understanding, training and practice to dismantle racism; and (2) further reconciliation and justice both by laity and clergy within the church and community; and

Whereas, the CDRD intends to assist congregations in building capacity to implement the practices of telling the truth, proclaiming the dream, practicing the way of love and repairing the breach, which are the practices that will help us fulfill the church's long term commitment to racial healing, reconciliation and justice; therefore be it

Resolved, That congregations in the Episcopal Dioceses of Western New York and Northwestern Pennsylvania shall organize by 2022 a series of conversations to promote the spiritual and structural change required for racial justice and reconciliation and be it further

Resolved, That congregations be encouraged to structure these conversations using resources that will be provided on the diocesan website in early 2021 by the Mission Strategy Racial Justice Working Group and the adaptive change process and be it further

Resolved, that congregations be encouraged to collaborate in holding these conversations and be it further

Resolved, that each congregation or collaborative group of congregations designate one (1) or two (2) members as Racial Reconciliation Liaisons to work with the CDRD; and be it further

Resolved, That each congregation or collaborative group of congregations under the leadership of its Racial Reconciliation Liaisons organize this work and report any findings/recommendations to CDRD not later than thirty (30) days prior to the 2022 Diocesan Convention.

Rationale:

In light of the numerous inexcusable deaths of unarmed Black men and women and the realities of white supremacy, the Episcopal Church is charged with undertaking the difficult work of racial reconciliation through teaching, engagement and action.

A number of tools for facilitating these congregations exist. The Mission Strategy Racial Justice Working Group is compiling a set of these resources for distribution in early 2021, and the CDRD is prepared to help congregations use Adaptive Action, a process developed by system thinkers to identify successful patterns for advancing systemic change. Adaptive action has proven helpful when the challenge seems overwhelming and may be helpful in promoting change in our church's behavior, practices and structures.

This resolution is an effort to get all congregations within the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania and Western New York involved in responding to racial injustice with the intent to grow a Beloved Community of healers, justice makers and reconcilers.

BECOMING BELOVED COMMUNITY

Resources available at episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community/

PLEDGE OF FAITH AND ACTION

The Commission to Dismantle Racism and Discrimination

The Partnership Dioceses of WNY and NWPA

episcopalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-Pledge-Update-.pdf