



## Meaningful Conversations on Race: A Discussion Guide



DISCUSSION GUIDE, RACE AND ETHNICITY, RESOURCE TOPICS, RESOURCE TYPES, VIDEO, VITAL CONVERSATIONS, VITAL CONVERSATIONS

The General Commission on Religion and Race invites United Methodist Christians of goodwill to engage in conversations about race, racial identity and the challenges that come when racial prejudices and bias are combined with institutional power and privilege, typically defined as racism.

These discussions are not easy to undertake. Our shame, fear, race, anger, frustrations, confusion, personal biases, separation and segregation—including that which is institutional, personal and familial—often render it nearly impossible for even well-meaning people to “get at” how we feel about and how we can move through racialized differences toward becoming God’s beloved community.

Still, God in Christ Jesus is calling us to be courageous, steadfast and true to our calling to transform the world from one divided and warring to one where God’s peaceable kingdom will come. The Scriptures beckon us:

- “Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all time.” (Psalm 106:3)
- “Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord.” (Isaiah 1:18)
- “You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” (Isaiah 58:12)
- “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24)
- “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

We, the laity and clergy who are members of the staff and board of directors of the Commission, believe that now is the time to start conversations about the realities of race and racism and how they affect our communities, our congregations, our families, our nations and ourselves—even the ways we live out our faith.

As we read and watch news reports, observe and participate in the happenings in our cities and towns, and assess the racial dynamics in our communities and in our churches, we believe that Christians can and must bring our understanding of the power of God’s reconciliation and God’s justice to bear on the conversations and the situations in which we find ourselves.

So, for the next year, the General Commission on Religion and Race will release one or two video discussion-starters each month for your use. We invite you to begin this conversation in your Sunday school class, as a weekly class meeting, among United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men’s groups, young adult fellowships, ministry leadership teams, annual conference Cabinet, or as a study with team with people from other congregations or denominations.

Some suggestions:

- Invite people to participate in a weekly/biweekly/monthly discussion group about race and racism. Explain the time commitment, the fact that each person will

- take turns facilitating and that you will use discussion-starters from the General Commission on Religion and Race. Set a firm meeting time and stick with it.
- Plan for one or two sessions for each video, with each session lasting at least 60 to 75 minutes.
- Keep your group small, say no more than 8-10 people, so that everyone has the opportunity to reflect and speak.
- Rotate the roles of facilitator and recorder each time, so that everyone may participate fully. (Note-taking should be limited to any ideas the group wants to carry forward, including possible ministry/action items for the future).
- Set ground rules for the discussion—but not too many. Remind participants to speak from their own experiences and not on else's and avoid saying things like, "My Asian friend told me" or "My co-worker says Blacks don't." Also, affirm that frustration, confusion and fear are all part of the discussion—do not attempt to tamp down those feelings. And suggest that what is said in the group stays in the group.

## Questions/Discussion Starters—**Meaningful Conversations About Race** with The Rev. Dr. David Anderson Hooker

Video: [vimeo.com/149022025](https://vimeo.com/149022025)

The video, **Meaningful Conversations About Race**, lends itself to viewing and discussion by an interracial group. Consider joining with people from one or more congregations of another racial groups on this study. Select co-leaders, one from each group. To allow time for several people to share stories and have fuller discussions, you may want to divide this session into at least two, one-hour sessions. To keep the conversation moving, you might also assign as pre-work the article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh, available on pp. 79-82 of *Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development*, published by the Network of Educators on the Americas. The object is to discuss and listen to one another, so remind participants to take a deep breath, speak from their own experiences and listen carefully to one another.

1. Spend 15 minutes doing the attached "Face Test." Discuss how participants were able to create a full face or not. What does this test say about our worldviews and experience when it comes to cross-racial relationships?
2. What does Hooker say about the arguments that we should be "colorblind" and view our contemporary culture as "post-racial?" Why are we still "not beyond race," in his view?
3. Hooker asserts that "racism" is not about our individual points of view or actions; rather, he says, it is a system and an ideology about which most people are unaware, and that privileges one race over others. Review the article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh. Discuss ways specifically that White people and others may remain unaware of some kinds of racism.
4. In his dandelion-blue grass analogy, Hooker asserts that our systems are not neutral, but shaped by biases, tradition, histories and practices, which is one reason that dandelions are considered weeds to be destroyed, while blue grass is prized as creating a beautiful lawn. Consider the following list and discuss how our perceptions of race and racial identity influence what we consider as good/positive/appropriate/traditional appearance of:
  - A dating/marriage partner
  - A hardworking person
  - A safe neighborhood
  - Beautiful hair and skin
  - A reliable world leader
  - A cute baby
  - The "all-American" couple
  - The kind of pastor I want in my church
  - A Sunday school teacher
  - Artists' renderings of Jesus, Mary or Moses
  - A stained-glass depiction of The Good Shepherd
  - A person I would vote for as Mayor of my town
5. How do your current local-church experiences in worship, outreach, mission and witness prepare you to be in community with people of other races, especially when there is racial strife and division in our nation? What are some ways you are willing to work in your church to begin building ongoing relationships, Christian community and space for honest dialogue across racial lines?

*GCORR is building the capacity of The United Methodist Church to be contextually relevant and to reach more people, younger people, and more diverse people as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*