



Sacred Conversation on Race

Talking Points: Pastoral Letter on Racism

As a way of beginning discussion of the Pastoral Letter and the issues it raises, we invite you to use some of the Talking Points listed below. There are many more points listed than can be used effectively in any one session, so you may want to select three or four Talking Points best suited to the time allotted as well as to the needs of your congregation.

1. As you consider participating in this Sacred Conversation on Race, what would enable you to bring your whole self to this conversation? What fears do you have about what might happen? What hopes do you bring? What could you and others do to help create and sustain a conversation where everyone's voice is heard and respected, and where challenge and growth are also encouraged?
2. The Pastoral Letter on Racism stated that our denominational history can help us understand both the systems of racial oppression and the movements for racial justice that have been at work in our society for centuries. What kinds of programs or study groups might your congregation begin that could help members learn more about the history of racism and anti-racism within the United Church of Christ?
3. In what ways were you aware of your ethnic background when you were growing up? How would you describe that background? In what ways do you think this background has shaped your current values, habits, practices, ways of worship, and personal priorities?
4. Every local community and region of the country has its own history of institutionalized racism as well as histories of individuals, communities, and movements that resisted racism and worked for racial justice. What are some examples of institutionalized racism in your local community? What are some examples of people, communities, and movements that have resisted racism in your community? How could you learn more about both of these histories – past and current?
5. In what ways does your local congregation reflect a particular cultural and ethnic tradition in its form of worship, meetings, leadership style, and the way decisions are made? Has this been a conscious choice on the part of your congregation's members and/or pastors? In what ways, if any, does your congregation reflect a variety of cultures and ethnic traditions in its forms of worship, meetings, leadership styles, and the way decisions are made? Has this been an intentional process? Has your congregation ever discussed what it would mean to become a multiracial, multicultural congregation?
6. Since 9/11, Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States have been the targets of increased discrimination and religious intolerance. What have been instances of this discrimination and/or religious intolerance in your local community? What might you and your church community do to become more informed about the discrimination and religious intolerance that Arab Americans and Muslims face in your local community? What might you and your church do to address this discrimination and religious bias?

7. The ethnic/racial makeup of the United States has changed dramatically throughout the last 20 years with significant immigration by people coming from the global South. Many towns and cities have experienced this phenomenal growth by instituting anti-immigration laws, particularly affecting Latinos/as. How have you seen this growth in your local community? In what ways do your personal ideals about the American dream affect how you think and feel about these new immigrants? How can reflection on the inclusive nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ assist you in making the stranger welcomed in your community?

8. If we consider 1776 to be the birth of the U.S. government, our nation is approximately 230 years old. For all but the last 40 years of that history, slavery and/or segregation were legally enforced realities that systematically denied People of Color equal access, rights, and opportunities in every realm of American society (education, housing, health care, etc.) It is not logical that the effects of several centuries of systemic racism could be eliminated or equalized in only 40 years time. How would you respond to someone who

says, “Racism is a thing of the past and we now have a level playing field”?

9. How would you respond to a White person who says, “The town and church I grew up in had only White people in it. So, racism wasn’t even a part of my life until I was an adult and left my hometown.” How might you help that person understand that racism was at work in the social structures and institutions of his or her home town? How might you invite this person to reflect on how racism helped to shape their understanding of what it means to be White in this society?

10. It has been recommended that each conversation in this ongoing dialogue end with at least one tangible and specific commitment to action on behalf of racial justice in our communities so that these sacred conversations issue in deeds as well as words. This specific commitment might be something undertaken by individuals within the group or by the group as a whole. What process will enable your congregation or group to discuss and enact this recommendation? What mechanisms of follow-up or accountability might be helpful?