



Sacred Conversation on Race

Appendix A: Four Realms of Racism and Change

There are four realms in which racism is manifest in this society: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural. For change to be genuine and lasting, it must encompass all four of these realms. There are age-old debates about where change must begin or which realm is most important, but these four realms are inextricably related. They feed into one another and, even though change in one realm does not guarantee change in another, all are important and deserving of our time and attention.

The **personal realm** encompasses our values, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. Racism is expressed in the personal realm in such things as fear of difference, prejudice, and stereotypes. Examples include the belief that European American cultural and religious traditions are inherently superior or the belief that People of Color are less capable of academic excellence than White people.

In the **interpersonal realm**, individuals act on their fears, prejudices, and stereotypes. These behaviors, which can be conscious or unconscious, can be expressed as discrimination, condescension, verbal abuse or physical violence. Examples include such things as White people avoiding contact with People of Color or White people exhibiting paternalism in their interactions with People of Color.

Racism in the **institutional realm** finds expression in policies, practices, rules, or procedures that have been formally adopted or are informally in place. These policies, practices, rules, and procedures

function, intentionally or unintentionally, to grant unearned privileges to White people and to disadvantage People of Color. Examples of institutional racism include such things as racial profiling and searching for new staff members of a congregation through predominantly White friendship, publicity, and colleague networks.

The **cultural realm** refers to what groups value as right, true, beautiful, normal and worthy of our time and attention. Our cultural norms or beliefs affect what we understand to be normal or appropriate styles of behavior, expression, and thought. Cultural racism is manifest when the cultural values of the dominant racial group are considered the only acceptable values. Examples of cultural racism include such things as images of Christ as a White Person or the belief that European classical music and hymns are “real” church music.

For our sacred conversations on race to affect change that is lasting and genuinely transformative, our study, dialogue, and action must address all four realms. Although we may choose to focus on one realm at any given time, if we remain in that realm, to the exclusion of the others, our work for racial change will be truncated and incomplete.

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