



SACRED *Conversations* ON RACE, CULTURE, AND RECONCILIATION

A MULTICULTURAL MINISTRIES RESOURCE GUIDE
THE SALVATION ARMY USA CENTRAL TERRITORY

“BUT LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN LIKE WATERS, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS
LIKE AN EVER-FLOWING STREAM.” AMOS 5:24

Sacred Conversations on Race, Culture, and Reconciliation

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Prayers from Philip F. Reinders, *Seeking God's Face: Praying with the Bible through the Year*, © 2010, 2013 by Faith Alive Christian Resources / Christian Reformed Church in North America, used with permission. All rights reserved. The abbreviations at the end of each prayer refer to church confessions. You will find these confessions named and their use explained on pp. 21-22 of *Seeking God's Face*.

Questions throughout the sessions were adapted from *Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation: A Guide for Public Dialogue and Problem Solving*, Carolyne Miller Abdullah and Susan McCormack. Used by permission. 2008 by The Paul J. Aicher Foundation. These sessions are denoted by an asterisk (*) after the session title.

SACRED Conversations ON RACE, CULTURE, AND RECONCILIATION


*A guide to beginning gracious conversations around a
complex and critical issue of our time*

PURPOSE & DESIGN OF CONVERSATIONS

SACRED CONVERSATIONS ON RACE, CULTURE AND RECONCILIATION is a resource designed to assist officers, soldiers, and employees in having gracious conversations around the complex and sensitive topics of race, our racial histories, and racial reconciliation. Conversations are enriched by gathering people from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. Considering that conversations about race can be difficult, and at times, uncomfortable, the format is designed with this reality in mind.

Sessions begin with basic questions and build up to deeper levels of engagement. They are designed equally for the novice and experienced to engage in meaningful conversation. It is our hope that knowledge will be gained, perspectives enlarged, understanding deepened, and bridges built toward lasting reconciliation.

Facilitator and participants are partners in this journey together. The facilitator's primary role will be to establish ground rules for the group, promote discussion through session questions, and ensure that each participant has the opportunity to share. Participants are expected to demonstrate a commitment to the dialogue process by being open, thoughtful, focused, willing to share their stories, and to engage respectfully.



These conversations are designed to be more than just a one-time event, but an ongoing guide for the journey.

■ WE WANT TO:

- 🌀 Create ways for people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds to speak honestly and listen to each other.
- 🌀 Create ways for participants to see and understand the invisible and destructive effects of racism.
- 🌀 Have conversations that are meaningful to beginners, as well as to those who have been exploring these issues for a long time.
- 🌀 Engage in conversations that look at the “black and white” nature of race, but are inclusive of other ethnic and cultural groups.
- 🌀 Look at our national situation and its impact at the local level.
- 🌀 Take stock of the challenges within our sphere of influence, and work with others to make changes that lead to communities that reflect our mission.

(Miller Abdulla & McCormack, 2008)

■ SACRED CONVERSATIONS GUIDE

This guide provides ten conversation sessions, with tools for leading a group within your corps, workplace, or community.

■ FACILITATOR ROLE

The facilitator’s role is to help group members have conversations that make room for all voices. Worried about your ability to answer every question about race, history, or racism? Facilitators are not experts on the topic, but fellow travelers who embrace the opportunity to learn.

■ LENGTH OF SESSION

Sessions are flexible and can be adapted to last forty-five minutes to 1-1/2 hours.

■ GROUND RULES

We believe that how we communicate will determine the participants' willingness to listen deeply and have meaningful discussion. To this end, establishing ground rules is critical to this dialogue process. The two sets of rules provided will help to create a safe space when dealing with difficult topics.

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use EMPATHETIC listening

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T = TRUST ambiguity because we are *not* here to debate who is right or wrong

(Law, 1996, p. 87)

GROUND RULES FOR RECONCILIATION

Use “I” statements

No “interrupting”

Maintain “confidentiality”

Be “present” – body, mind, and spirit

(Salter McNeil, 2016)

■ STORY SHARING | TESTIMONY

Story sharing or testimony is an important part of our tradition and provides an opportunity for people to speak truth from their personal experiences. During this time, participants speak without interruption, debate, or the need to convince or win an argument. If necessary, a timer can be used. Story sharing is integral to the success of the conversations.

■ MUTUAL INVITATION

Mutual Invitation will be used as a tool to ensure that those who want to share be given equal opportunity.

(Law, 1993, pp. 113-114)

■ ANCHORS

In addition to agreeing on how we will communicate, it is helpful for participants to have a word, phrase, or picture that “anchors” them in a safe space and strengthens their resolve to continue the conversation should it

become difficult or uncomfortable. Persisting through the hard work can lead to understanding and to healing.

■ CONTINUUM OF A RACIAL RECONCILER

In their conversation, [Reconciling Racial Tensions Together | Bill Hybels and James Meeks](#), Bill Hybels, [Willow Creek Church](#), and James Meeks, [Salem Baptist Church](#) address “the complexity of racial tension in America today.”

Following this interaction, Bill Hybels shared the continuum of a racial reconciler in the Message at Willow Creek Church. The continuum includes explanations of [the active racist, passive racist, beginner reconciler, and the advocate](#). This presentation took place over Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend in January of 2016.

(Willow Creek TV, 2016)

■ SESSIONS

Sacred Conversations on Race, Culture and Reconciliation

At the beginning of each conversation, the group leader should review the purpose for the session, role of the facilitator, communication guidelines, Mutual Invitation, anchors for safe spaces, and story sharing as key elements of the session.

Session questions are followed by a time of prayer and reflection on scripture. Participants may use Lectio Divina, an ancient Christian practice of praying and meditating on scripture. An explanation of Lectio Divina is found at [Lectio Divina: Praying the Scripture](#).



SESSION 1

CONOCIMIENTOS | KNOWLEDGE

- *Take a deeper look | Introduce ourselves*

*“Welcome. We will take the next hour getting to know one another across racial differences, and we will do it by using a process called *conocimientos* (meaning knowledge of people and places), devised with the intention of building a community across our differences. The focus is on “racial” difference in this case, but it can be replaced by other types of differences that divide us.”*

CATEGORIES:

Your name

Meaning of your name

Your birthplace

Your grandparents’ birthplaces

One value you learned from your elders that you will pass on to future generations

One thing you will not pass on

The leader begins by introduction using one of the categories. Allow each member to do the same in one minute depending upon group size. At the conclusion of introductions, ask questions to glean the experience such as:

How did it feel?

How did it compare to other forms of introductions?

What did you learn about yourself and others through this sharing?

*What do you see as the strengths of the *conocimientos* categories?*

(Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc., p. 15)
(Law, 1996, pp. 136-139)

LECTIO DIVINA:

Opening Prayer: GOD, provide the guidance so I may think about my ways, and turn my feet to Your testimonies. LORD, I pray that I find the divine in each person I meet.

Scripture Reflection: Matthew 16:13-20

Closing Prayer: Father, help me accept people the way they are, to have sound judgement, and be loving, caring and respectful to all those I meet. Help me appreciate each person as I listen to his or her story.

SESSION 2

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT RACE?

- *Where are we?*

QUESTIONS:

1. Why is it so difficult to talk about race/racism?
2. What is the beneficial part of talking about race/racism?
3. Who is affected by race/racism?
4. What effects of racism do you see evidenced in personal and institutional ways?
5. What practical steps can you take to combat racism within your sphere of influence?
6. What is GOD calling you to do or be in response to this conversation?

LECTIO DIVINA:

Opening Prayer: Father of all people, hear our prayers. Lead us in the way of peace in this world, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our LORD and Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, forever, Amen.

Scripture Reflection: Leviticus 19:33-34 | Galatians 3:28

Closing Prayer: Show us LORD, Your faithful love, grant us Your saving help. His saving help is near for those who fear Him; His glory will dwell in our land. (Ps. 85:7, 9)

SESSION 3

IT COULD HAPPEN HERE

- *Where are we?*

QUESTIONS:

1. How have race-related events and racial tensions around the country affected you?
2. What incident(s) do you recall that brought the reality of racial tensions to the surface for you?
3. What was your response to what you heard or saw (i.e. news reports, articles, videos, twitter, Facebook, etc.)? What was the response to people around you to these incidents? Were they similar to your response or different?
4. What are underlying conditions that might make us have different approaches to talking about race?
5. What are underlying conditions or barriers that hinder better race relations?
6. In what way is God calling you to respond to what you have heard?

** There have been several race-related incidents that participants might recall. They include the deaths of Trevon Martin; Michael Brown (Ferguson, MO); Tamir Rice; Laquan McDonald; Walter Scott; members and pastor of Mother Emmanuel AME Church (Charleston, SC); Dallas Police Officers during peaceful protest; Philando Castile; NFL players kneeling during the national anthem; the Charlottesville Rally, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd*

LECTIO DIVINA:

Opening Prayer: Father, You sent Your son Jesus Christ, to bring the new light of salvation to the world. May He enlighten us with His radiance, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one GOD, forever, Amen.

Scripture Reflection: Numbers 12:1-11 | Matthew 8:5-13

Closing Prayer: Come, let us bow low and do reverence, kneel before Yahweh who made us! For He is our GOD, and we the people of His sheepfold, the flock of His hand. (Ps. 95:6-7)

SESSION 4

MAKING THE CONNECTION*

- *Who are we?*

QUESTIONS:

1. Tell a story, or give an example to show how your background or early experiences have affected your ideas about racism and other ethnic groups.
2. What was your first exposure to messages that concern racial stereotypes? Who told you about them?
3. When did you first realize that some people thought about race very differently than you?
4. Have you experienced racism or discrimination? What is your first memory? Have you seen it?
5. How has racism affected people you know?
6. What is GOD calling you to do, be, or change because of this conversation?

LECTIO DIVINA:

Opening Prayer: All powerful and ever living GOD, direct Your love that is with us, that our efforts in the name of Your Son may bring humanity to unity and peace.

Scripture Reflection: Mark 3:31-35

Closing Prayer: Yahweh, what quantities of good things You have in store for those who fear You, and bestow on those who make You their refuge, for all humanity to see. (Ps. 31:19)

SESSION 5

FAMILY & COMMUNITY*

- *Who are we?*

QUESTIONS:

You may have heard family members, friends, co-workers, or neighbors make prejudiced remarks.

1. How do you think they learned their prejudice? How do you feel when you hear people talk this way? How do you react?
2. What is one value around race/ethnicity, or cultural differences that you learned from your parents that you would like to pass on to the next generation?
3. What is something you learned about race/ethnicity or cultural differences that you do not want to pass on to the next generation?
4. What is GOD calling me to do, be, or change because of this conversation?

LECTIO DIVINA:

Opening Prayer: Father of love, hear our prayers. Help us to know Your will and to do it with courage and faith. We ask this through Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one GOD, forever, Amen.

Scripture Reflection: Romans 10:12-13

Closing Prayer: I waited, I waited for Yahweh, then he stooped to me and heard my cry for help. He put a fresh song in my mouth, praise GOD. (Ps. 40:1, 3)



SESSION 6

YOUR PERSONAL INVENTORY*

- *Who are we?*

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your racial, ethnic and cultural heritage? What are you most proud of from that heritage?
2. Growing up, what kind of contact did you have with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds? When were you first aware that there were such things as racial and ethnic differences?
3. What are your first memories of people of color being treated differently than whites? What are your first memories of whites being treated differently than people of color? Recall specific incidents if you can. How did you feel?
4. How did important adults in your life (parents, teachers, ministers, etc.) help you understand and interpret your experiences with racial groups different from your own? What did they tell you about specific groups?
5. What is GOD calling you to do, be, or change as a result of this conversation?

LECTIO DIVINA:

Opening Prayer: Almighty GOD, listen favorably to the prayer of Your people, and grant us Your peace in our day. We ask this through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture Reflections: Ephesians 4:32

Closing Prayer: Joy and happiness in you, to all who seek you! Let them ceaselessly cry, “Great is Yahweh” who love your saving power. (Ps. 40)

SESSION 7

OUR ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS AND RACISM*

Prior to this session, invite people to bring something representative of their racial, cultural or ethnic background to share with the group. This can be a picture, drawing, a poem, object, food, music, etc.

COMMENTS:

“Often we think about racism as something that only affects “blacks” and “whites.” However, while our racial history in the U.S. is troubled and complex, our challenges are much more complex than that. This activity gives us an opportunity to learn more about who we are and where we came from. We will look at how our background affects the way we relate to each other and to our communities. This will help us learn more about the nature of racism and help us work together to overcome it.”

CULTURAL ITEMS

Invite each person to describe what they’ve brought.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did you choose your item?
2. What does it say about your background and who you are today?

3. What do the things we brought have in common? What are the differences?
4. What is GOD calling you to do, be, or change because of our conversation?

LECTIO DIVINA:

Opening Prayer: LORD, Our GOD, help us to love You with all our hearts and to love all men and women as You love them. Amen.

Scripture Reflection: Ephesians 2:13-22

Closing Prayer: Joy for all who take refuge in You, endless songs of gladness! You shelter them, they rejoice in You, those who love Your name. (Ps. 5 & 11)

SESSION 8

IMAGINING OUR FUTURE*

- *Where do we want to go?*

Think about the kind of community we want to have and look at changes we can make in our sphere of influence.

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of community (neighborhood, church, workplace, school, or organization) do you live in now? What does that community look like? What is the racial or ethnic makeup of the community? How are people interacting with each other?
2. In what specific ways do you wish race relations were different in your community? What would have to happen so that race relations improve?
3. Tell a story about a time when race was “center” within that community?
4. What are some of the helping/hindering forces to improving race relations, even if there are different ways of understanding that story?
5. What are some steps to take that will advance race relations in your sphere of influence (e.g., your neighborhood, Corp/Church, workplace, organizations, and schools)?

LECTIO DIVINA:

Opening Prayer: O, God, give us a vision of community where all people can flourish. Amen.

Scripture Reflection: Ephesians 2:19

Closing Prayer: God, you have shown us what is good and what you require of us. Help us to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with one another and with You. (Mic. 6:8)

SESSION 9

AMERICA BY THE NUMBERS WITH MARIA HINOJOSA (Video)

- *Looking at the future today*

Maria Hinojosa is an award-winning journalist. She is the anchor and executive producer of Latino USA on National Public Radio, a public radio show devoted to Latino issues. She is also the founder, president and CEO of Futuro Media Group, which produces the show.

AMERICAN BY THE NUMBERS, Season 1, Episode 1, Mainstream, USA

<https://www.pbs.org/video/america-numbers-mainstream-usa/>

(Hinojosa, 2014)

QUESTIONS:

1. After watching this video, what word, image, or phrase comes to mind?
2. What does the video say about the changing demographics in the U.S.?
3. In what ways are people you know responding to changes in society?
4. What is GOD calling you to do, be, or change because of what you have seen and heard?

“In the last few decades, the town of Clarkston has undergone a significant demographic shift. Whites made up almost 90% of the residents of this small town in Georgia in 1980, but by 2012 over 80% of Clarkston residents were non-white. How are these rapid changes affecting this small town? Watch the full episode to find out.” --
<https://www.pbs.org/video/america-numbers-mainstream-usa/> *Aired 10.03.14

LECTIO DIVINA:

Opening Prayer: O, God, help us to be open to the work that you are doing as we see the many changes happening around us. Amen.

Scripture Reflection: Acts 17:26

Closing Prayer: Skillful Savior, as you build your church from the entire human race, you gather in sinful, broken people who long for your kingdom. You take us as individuals and build us into so much more than we could ever be on our own—a spiritual house, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. May your church flourish everywhere. Amen. (HC 54) —from, *Seeking God’s Face* by Philip F. Reinders (Faith Alive, 2013), p. 517

SESSION 10

RACE THE POWER OF AN ILLUSION

- *Taking a deeper look*

TEN THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RACE

**Handout can be found in the Appendix of this resource.*

(California Newsreel, 2003, Handout)

“Our eyes tell us that people look different. No one has trouble distinguishing a Czech from a Chinese, but what do those differences mean? Are they biological? Has race always been with us? How does race affect people today? There is less and more to race than meets the eye.”

Direct participants to the handout – TEN THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RACE in the Appendix. Have participants identify 2-3 statements that were new or most surprising about race.

QUESTIONS:

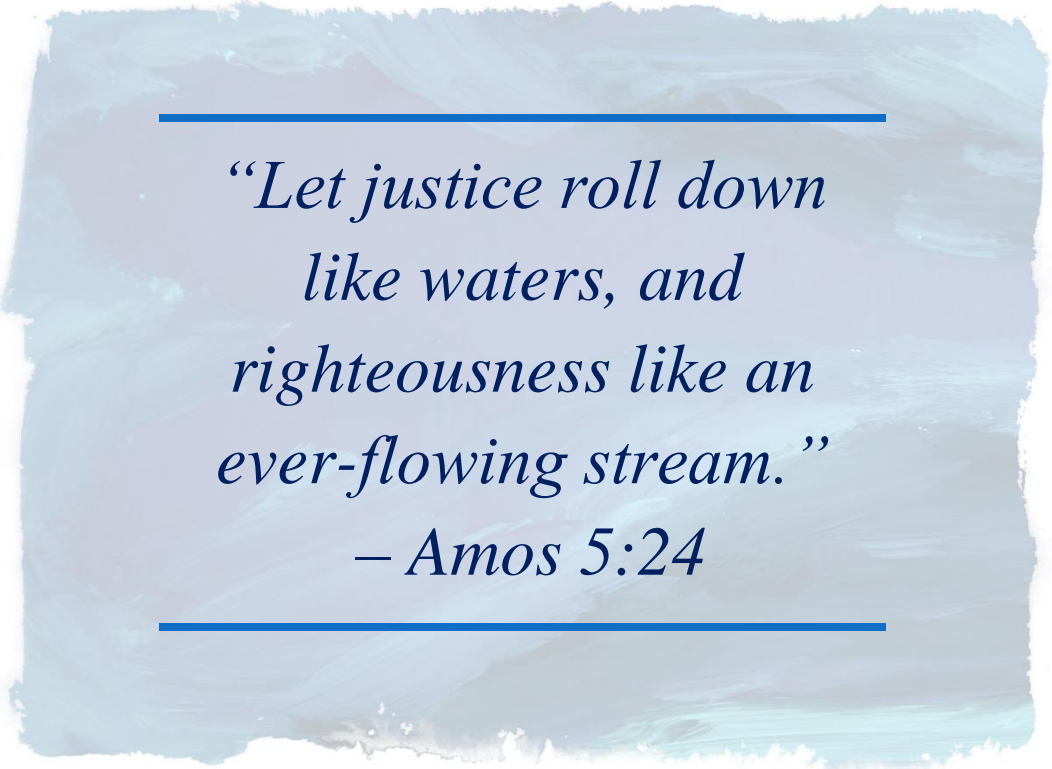
1. Of the statements on the list, which are new or the most surprising to you?
2. In what ways did these statements challenge your understanding about race?
3. What is GOD calling you to do, be, or change as a result of this conversation

LECTIO DIVINA:

Opening Prayer: O, God, help us to stand in the wonder of the diversity that is all around us.

Scripture Reflection: Revelation 7:9

Closing Prayer: Merciful God, when tempted to be envious or jealous, when I insult or hate my neighbor by words or deeds, looks or gestures, reveal my ... heart and lead me to repentance and reconciliation ... Amen. (HC 105) –from, *Seeking God's Face* by Philip F. Reinders (Faith Alive, 2013), p. 583



*“Let justice roll down
like waters, and
righteousness like an
ever-flowing stream.”*

– Amos 5:24

APPENDIX

This appendix provides detailed explanation for the tools used in this guide.

■ MUTUAL INVITATION

Mutual Invitation is a process that ensures that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak. Participants should proceed in the following way: The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.

If you are not ready to share yet, say “I pass for now” and we will invite you to share later on. If you don’t want to say anything at all, simply say “pass” and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

We invite you to listen and not to respond to someone’s sharing immediately. There will be time to respond and to ask clarification questions after everyone has had an opportunity to share.

(Law, 1993, p. 113-114)

■ COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others.
Avoid judgmental language, which can cause defensiveness and cut off communication. Instead, use “I” statements. Begin with “I” claiming

what is yours. For example, I feel, I know, I believe, I think, I notice, I wonder, etc.

E = use EMPATHETIC listening.

Put yourself in the other person's shoes and attempt to see and experience the issue from the speaker's perspective. This is a commitment that we make to try as hard as we can to understand each other and know our limits. Therefore, it is okay to ask clarifying questions. It is also okay to give feedback to check if you have understood what the speaker was saying.

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles.

When someone behaves differently from you, do not interpret that behavior using your own assumptions of what is good communication. Remind yourself that this person might be communicating in a very different way, and there might be opportunities to learn more about how the other communicates.

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak.

Think before you speak.

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions.

As you ponder, ask yourself what caused you to feel, think, or react in a certain way. Where might these ideas come from? If you are able to notice your own assumptions, you are more able to take responsibility for your own thinking and feeling.

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY.

In order to uphold the well-being of each person in the group, keep personal information shared in confidence. This way, we can feel safer to talk about real issues that concern our lives and our communities without the fear they might be shared outside, without the full benefit of the trust developed in the group.

T = TRUST ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong. To address these issues constructively, we must be willing and able to listen to each other's different experiences and points of view even though at times, the ambiguity might be uncomfortable for some of us. By listening empathically without judgment and debate, we, as a community, may gain a fuller description of the issues we are trying to address. In this way, instead of being divided, we can move forward, working together to find constructive ways to address them.

(Law, 2013)

▪ Communication is one of the most important elements to build a more inclusive community. People of different backgrounds bring with them unique communication styles. Sometimes these differences can cause conflicts among members of a community, often in an unconscious way.

Guidelines for communication are like traffic rules one has to understand and observe before obtaining a license to drive a car. We are required to pass a test proving we know and will follow the rules to lessen the possibility of traffic accidents. Interpersonal communication does not require people to pass a test, but we do need to remind others to interact respectfully. Conditioned by our society, we may react to others who are different with negative attitudes, put-downs, judgments, and dismissal. If we are to express the essence of God's inclusiveness, we need to agree to behave differently when we are attempting to build a more inclusive community. The Respectful Communication Guidelines provide a foundation to uphold the well-being of a community.

These communication guidelines are used in each session.

The [Respectful Communication Guidelines](#) and their explanations (found in the [Building Bridges](#) resources) are used in the work of the [Kaleidoscope Institute](#) and are written as an acronym, RESPECT, to help in remembering. During the first meeting of the group, the meaning of each letter should be explained. In

later meetings, the guidelines should be read, with some brief explanation, as needed.

(Law, 2013)

GROUND RULES FOR RECONCILIATION

1. Use “I” Statements
2. No “Interrupting”
3. Maintain “Confidentiality”
4. Be Present
 - a. “Body”
 - b. “Mind”
 - c. “Spirit”

Use “I” Statements

Allow people to own their own statements and feelings. “I” statements keep us from making dogmatic statements that can alienate other people.

For example, using the term “everybody” can put others on the defensive. As a result, it can diminish the possibility that others will hear what is being said. The correct way to use an “I” statement is to say, “I feel...” “I think...” “In my opinion...” **rather than** “I think that you...” or “Everybody knows that...” or “All right-thinking people...”

Another way of using an “I” statement is to say, “My experience is...”

No interrupting

Introverts and extroverts process and share differently. For example, extroverts often process aloud and need the opportunity to clarify their thoughts and intent of communication. Introverts typically process internally being provided opportunities to share their thoughts without interruption. We want to create a

space for everyone to speak without interruption. This is one way of ensuring that a variety of voices and perspectives are heard and people are being respected.

Maintain Confidentiality

Create a “safe environment” by providing a space for people to share difficult and sensitive information. Discussing reconciliation, people often take the risk of saying something personal or embarrassing. It is important to honor the risk by not allowing others to discuss conversations outside the context of the session. When this occurs, trust is broken and discourages future honesty by other members of the group. Privacy includes not sharing pictures or comments of others on social media without previous permission.

Be Fully Present

This one should not be overlooked! In this day of smart phones and social media, people are often physically present but not fully engaged with those around them. We need the whole person to be involved to get the most out of discussions. Ask people to agree to turn off (or at least silence) their cell phones and commit to being fully present to the experience. You want each person to be present in mind, body, and spirit!

(Salter McNeil, 2016)

■ ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

The [facilitator's] role is an important one that requires listening skills and discernment in knowing when and when not to speak. Leaders must set and follow ground rules for participation in dialogue. Establishing rules helps to create a safe environment for openness and sharing. The dialogue leader's responsibility is to the group as a whole, while also considering each person's individuality and level of comfort.

Leading a dialogue is an intensive activity requiring a high level of alertness and awareness. Conversations are often conducted by two or more leaders, so it may be particularly valuable to have co-leaders of a different race, ethnic background, and gender. Co-leadership can help to balance the dialogue and "model" the type of collaboration you hope to encourage.

Discussion leaders are critical to making the dialogue work.

While the leader does not need to be an "expert" or the most knowledgeable person in the group on the topic, he or she should be the most prepared to facilitate discussion. Facilitators keep the group moving forward, using phrases that enhance conversation and encourage sharing. Understanding goals, planning ahead, setting the direction, and anticipating questions are important to walk participants through the discussion. The leader guides the communication process to avoid derailment while allowing participants to dictate the flow of topics. Solid preparation will enable facilitators to give full attention to how participants relate to one another and to listen to content shared.

The [facilitator] plays several roles.

Open the session by informing the group that the time is for open, honest, and cooperative dialogue, and define your role to remain neutral, focused, and adhere to the ground rules. Prior to opening discussion, establish ground rules and ensure participants agree to abide. Ground rules must emphasize respect, listening, honesty, and the importance of sharing time equitably. Stress the importance of respecting differences of opinion and perspectives. You might post the ground rules on a flip chart.

(Chace, 2003)

Facilitating difficult conversations can be [challenging]. Make time to process, reflect and recharge in positive ways. Find colleagues or friends who can listen while you debrief conversations about race and racism. ...Keep a journal to process and reflect.

(Bell & Lindberg, p. 12)

■ EVALUATIONS

Evaluations can be written or expressed verbally to measure the outcome of the dialogue. Questions might include:

Why did you join the group? What were your expectations? Were you comfortable participating in the discussion? Did the dialogue give you new insights about how to improve race relations? Was the dialogue climate positive and respectful? Did you find the dialogue to be a valuable experience overall? How might it have been improved? Would you like to participate in a future session? Did the experience motivate you to act differently? Do you have additional comments?

(Chace, 2003, p. 10)

■ HANDLING CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Here's how to handle some challenging situations.

The best method for handling challenging situations is to anticipate them and be prepared. Each conversation is a unique experience, providing new opportunities for the discussion leader. Even those who have been facilitators for many years are often faced with new problems requiring on-the-spot creative action. There are no certain answers; sometimes group discussions do not go well, other times, participants seem engaged and satisfied. The following scenarios present possible challenges and offer guidelines for handling to the dialogue leader.

THE CHALLENGE

The group is slow to respond to the process.

How to Handle It: Check to determine whether your directions were understood. You may need to restate the purpose of the process and how it should be carried out. You may also have people who resist participating because of "power" issues in the group. If so, invite them to participate to the degree they feel comfortable. Assure them that the purpose of the process is to share different insights, experiences, and personal reflections on the topic. How the members choose to participate is valuable. It is also important to make sure members are physically comfortable.

THE CHALLENGE

One or a few members dominate the dialogue.

How to Handle It: The instructions you give to participants about respecting time limits are helpful. Ask participants to be conscious of each person's time to share his or her reflections, ideas, and insights. It may be helpful to invoke the ground rule "It is important to share time equitably" when a few individuals dominate the discussion. Another solution is to tell the group you would like to hear from those who have not said much. Participants will look to you to restrain domineering members. Sometimes, this situation happens when those

dominating the dialogue feel they have not been heard. Restating the essence of what they have expressed can show that you understood their point of view. *(Mutual Invitation can be a very useful tool).

THE CHALLENGE

The dialogue leader feels strongly about an issue and has trouble staying unbiased.

How to Handle It: The dialogue leader needs to remain on task, which is to guide the process and to elicit and respect all members' thoughts. If leaders really respect the views of others, and show interest and curiosity for other experiences and viewpoints, it will not be difficult to keep personal ideas from over-influencing the dialogue. This is not to say that the dialogue leader never shares with the members in the process. However, you must guard against moving from a discussion leader into a "teacher/ lecturer" mode.

THE CHALLENGE

A participant walks out of a group following a heated conflict.

How to Handle It: Sometimes the conversation may become heated. Other times, people may seem to be on the verge of fighting; and sometimes they may even walk out. The best way to deal with conflict is to confront it directly. Remind participants that they were initially told to expect [differences to be shared], but that they agreed to respond to differences respectfully. The [facilitator] should always stop name-calling, personal attacks, and threats. This is one situation where you should readily appeal to the group for support. If they accepted the ground rules, they will support you. (Chace, 2003, pp. 19-20)

HANDOUT: Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race

Our eyes tell us that people look different. No one has trouble distinguishing a Czech from a Chinese, but what do those differences mean? Are they biological? Has race always been with us? How does race affect people today? There is less – and more – to race than meets the eye:

1. **Race is a modern idea.** Ancient societies, like the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical distinctions, but according to religion, status, class, even language. The English language did not include the word ‘race’ until it turned up in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar referring to a line of kings.
2. **Race has no genetic basis.** Not one characteristic, trait, or even one gene distinguishes all the members of one so-called race from all the members of another so-called race.
3. **Human subspecies don’t exist.** Unlike many animals, modern humans simply have not been around long enough or isolated enough to evolve into separate subspecies or races. Despite surface appearances, we are one of the most similar of all species.
4. **Skin color really is only skin deep.** Most traits are inherited independently from one another. The genes influencing skin color have nothing to do with the genes influencing hair form, eye shape, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability, or forms of intelligence. Knowing someone’s skin color does not tell you anything else about him or her.
5. **Most variation is within, not between, "races."** Of the small amount of total human variation, 85% exists within any local population, be they Italians, Kurds, Koreans, or Cherokees. About 94% can be found within any continent. That means two random Koreans may be as genetically different as a Korean and an Italian.

6. **Slavery predates race.** Throughout much of human history, societies have enslaved others, often as a result of conquest or war, even debt, but not because of physical characteristics or a belief in natural inferiority. Due to a unique set of historical circumstances, ours was the first slave system where all the slaves shared similar physical characteristics.
7. **Race and freedom evolved together.** The U.S. was founded on the radical new principle that "All men are created equal." But our early economy was based largely on slavery. How could this anomaly be rationalized? The new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.
8. **Race justified social inequalities as natural.** As the race idea evolved, white superiority became "common sense" in America. It justified not only slavery, but also the extermination of Indians, exclusion of Asian immigrants, and the taking of Mexican lands by a nation that professed a belief in democracy. Racial practices were institutionalized within American government, laws, and society.
9. **Race isn't biological, but racism is still real.** Race is a powerful social idea that gives people different access to opportunities and resources. Our government and social institutions have created advantages that disproportionately channel wealth, power, and resources to white people. This affects everyone, whether we are aware of it or not.
10. **Colorblindness will not end racism.** Pretending race does not exist is not the same as creating equality. Race is more than stereotypes and individual prejudice. To combat racism, we need to identify and remedy social policies and institutional practices that advantage some groups at the expense of others. (California Newsreel, 2003)

SCRIPTURE

The following scriptures are provided for discussion and reflection on the topics of race, reconciliation, community, peacemaking, or a vision for the future.

“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” Amos 5:24

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your GOD.” Micah 6:8

**“Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”
Psalm 34:14**

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” Revelation 7:9

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with GOD’S people and also members of HIS household.” Ephesians 2:19

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32

“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy in my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” Isaiah 11:6-9

“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” Isaiah 2:4

“All this is from GOD, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: That GOD was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to GOD through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”

Ephesians 2:14-18

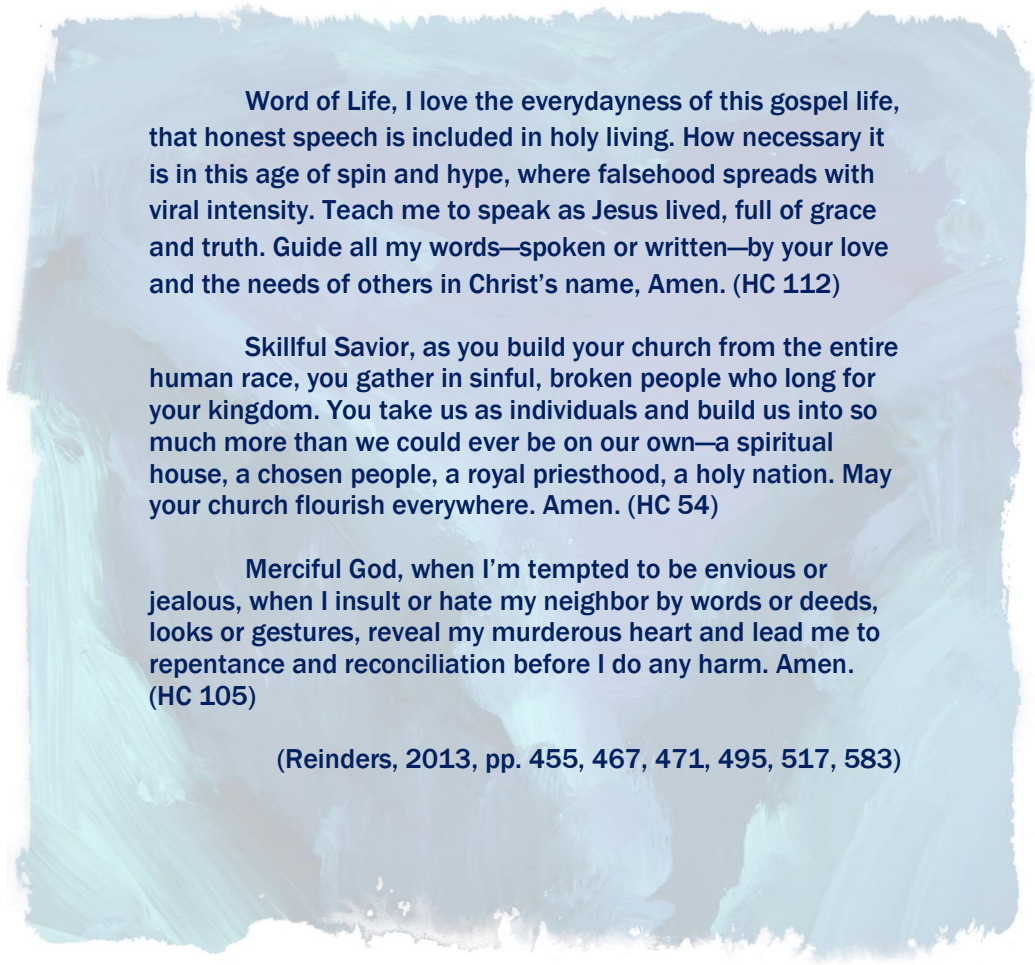
PRAYERS

The following prayers are from Seeking God's Face by Philip F. Reinders (Faith Alive, 2013) and are located in that resource at the designated page #. See inside flap for explanation of sources.

“Creator of color, Lord of variety, forgive our attempts to make your church fit a bland oneness. Differences frighten us, so we instinctively down play them—which only reveals our ignorance of the gospel and you. Thank you, triune god, for showing in yourself something so refreshingly different, a unity that is not uniformity but a refreshing diversity of one God and three persons. Amen. (BC.9)

Thank you, almighty God, that we are free in Christ Jesus—free from the pointing finger of condemnation, from the curse of the law, the bullying of sin, the sting of death, free from fear. But more than that—freed to love you, to willingly yield our lives to you, to know you, and to cry from our hearts, “Abba, Father.” Amen. (WC 20)

Compelling Lord and Savior, thank you for the beauty of a gospel centered life. Your kingdom-calling isn't that we merely avoid evil and keep our noses clean, but that we work for the good of those around us. So plunge us deep into gospel living in our neighborhoods, exhibiting a patient, peace-loving, gentle life of love that protects others and seeks the good of all, even our enemies. Amen. (HC 107)



Word of Life, I love the everydayness of this gospel life, that honest speech is included in holy living. How necessary it is in this age of spin and hype, where falsehood spreads with viral intensity. Teach me to speak as Jesus lived, full of grace and truth. Guide all my words—spoken or written—by your love and the needs of others in Christ’s name, Amen. (HC 112)

Skillful Savior, as you build your church from the entire human race, you gather in sinful, broken people who long for your kingdom. You take us as individuals and build us into so much more than we could ever be on our own—a spiritual house, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. May your church flourish everywhere. Amen. (HC 54)

Merciful God, when I’m tempted to be envious or jealous, when I insult or hate my neighbor by words or deeds, looks or gestures, reveal my murderous heart and lead me to repentance and reconciliation before I do any harm. Amen. (HC 105)

(Reinders, 2013, pp. 455, 467, 471, 495, 517, 583)

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Lectio Divina: Praying the Scriptures

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SACRED CONVERSATIONS

Lastly, “Sacred Conversations” has been used by churches for gatherings that intentionally address racial justice and other challenging topics of our times. We first saw the term in print in a document published by the United Church of Christ: Sacred Conversation on Race on April 3, 2008. This is a church-wide initiative for United Church of Christ congregations. The title is not unique to this resource.

LECTIO DIVINA

Thank you to the Australia Southern Territory of The Salvation Army for their contributions of Lectio Divina to this guide.

DISCLAIMER

We reviewed several resources created by churches and community organizations to develop this “starter” guide for SACRED CONVERSATIONS ON RACE, CULTURE, AND RECONCILIATION. However, there were two resources, COMMUNITY DIALOGUE GUIDE: Conducting a Discussion on Race and Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation: A Guide for Public Dialogue and Problem Solving that were primary sources. From them, we adapted tools for facilitators, as well as the questions and activities for the conversations. These resources have helped to clarify our purpose for the guide.