

GNW Area United Methodists Stand Against Racism **Inventory of Images and Communication Mechanisms**

Philippians 2:1, 3-5

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy...Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...

Bishop Elaine Stanovsky, in [Part 2 of her 2020 Episcopal address](#), has called on all local congregations to:

- Examine the visual images present in worship spaces and facilities, newsletters, for imagery that is culturally biased or exclusionary.

[[Video option](#) of text below for facilitators]

Jesus was a man of Middle Eastern descent. He was surely dark-skinned. His ministry was among the Jews, also dark-skinned. But like contemporary societies, the Jews were stratified by education and class, among other differences. As a person raised in Nazareth, Jesus was looked upon as inferior by those raised in the power seats of the Jewish culture. He came from the margins, and as he worked among the people, the margins to which he reached expanded. Recall his interaction with the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24-30.

Jesus drew his disciples from common people. When they - tasting a bit of fame and power themselves - sought to limit Jesus' reach, he said to them, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." Matt 18:6 NRSV. Jesus confronted the power to exclude even among his disciples, calling them to an understanding of the depth of humility required to be a Jesus-follower.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called in our time to confront power and privilege that have the potential to "...put a stumbling block..." before those who may seek to encounter Christ through our United Methodist faith communities in the Greater Northwest Area. This guide will support you in the work of analyzing imagery and communications for the ways they elevate or center whiteness or communicate exclusion.

As you do this work, remember the difference between intent and impact. Though our intent may be positive or hopeful, our impacts may be negative and diminishing. As United Methodist Christians we are called to radical hospitality, which will include *decentering* the images and communication methods that normalize whiteness. Each step has the potential to open our eyes to notice the subtle messages embedded in our traditions, and to ask why.

GUIDE

The following is a guide to help you and your congregation inventory your building, art, and communication methods for story that they tell. The areas to be assessed include:

- Art, banners, posters, etc., and stain glass throughout the building
- Mailers, signs, and other print communication
- Website and other social media presence

This is important work for all congregations as The United Methodist Church moves to stand against racism. It would be more comfortable if the church could skirt the history of racism against Black people [referenced in short and sanitized form in the Book of Discipline¹ and in more complete form in other publications like [Christianity Today](#)] that led to the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and others. But we cannot skirt this history, or the history of racism against American Indians and other communities of color. This history extends into the present day when our images center whiteness, offering a subliminal message - mostly unintended but not always - of who is included and who is excluded, who is valued and who is not valued.

We know that our buildings were built without a robust critique of whiteness and colonization. In fact, the story of westward expansion that many in the northwest value, is also the story of colonization that incorrectly conflated discipleship (God's work in the world) with whiteness. Methodism participated in this error. As a 94% white denomination, we mourn that we have not known how deeply this error has impacted our ministry. [Insert a personal story or use this [video story](#)]

Your work here is emblematic of the deep work that we must do to recognize and repent of messages and systems that exclude, in order that we might reflect the heart of God and God's care for all peoples – a heart for loving our neighbor and beloved community. Even if your context multi-ethnic or among Black, Indigenous or People of Color (BIPOC), this work will provide a catalyst for deep and necessary conversation on how diligent we must be inside the church and in society to uncover subliminal messages that center and normalize whiteness.

This is the work of standing against racism, no matter how uncomfortable it might be.

Additional Resources

[Searching for a Jesus that Looks More Like Me](#), NY Times, Ap 10, 2020.

[Ken Burns, Our Monuments are Representation of Myth, not Fact](#). YouTube.

[Confederate Statues Were Built to Further a 'White Supremacist Future'](#), NPR, August 20, 2017.

¹ 2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline, A Brief History of The United Methodist Church. Page 15 references Richard Allen, whose mistreatment by Methodists led to the organization of The African Methodist Episcopal Church, with similar issues leading to founding of other traditionally Black Methodist denominations that followed.

SUGGESTED EXERCISE

Step 1: Inventory & Presentation

Build a PowerPoint or other presentation detailing the following:

1. Photo library of every stain glass window, piece of art, carving, banner, etc. or pictures
 - Caption each picture or set of pictures with the story that is told by what you have captured
2. Critically look at the pictures of Jesus displayed in your building and on your website, in newsletters or other forms of communication for:
 - Cultural identity (who does Jesus look like)?
 - What is he doing?
 - Who is he with?
 - From what cultural perspectives might the image be assessed as positive, and from what cultural perspectives might it be assessed as negative?
3. What other biblical stories are told in images and on your website, in newsletter or other forms of communication?
 - What cultural messages do you see portrayed in them?
 - Might these messages be received differently from different cultural perspectives?
 - What/who is depicted as good and powerful, and poor and weak?
4. How is the history of westward expansion or history of colonization depicted in your building, your art works, your various methods of communication?
 - Analyze how Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent, westward expansion, etc. are portrayed.
 - Is colonization history depicted as God's story?
5. How is national history depicted in your building, your art works, and your various forms of communication?
 - Which historical figures are present and honored?
 - Who is memorialized in your building, your sanctuary, your grounds, etc.?
 - What events or people are things dedicated to?
 - Is the national story depicted as God's story?
6. How are missions depicted in your building, your art works, and your various forms of communication?
 - What are the cross-cultural images saying?
 - Who represents the Gospel?
 - Who is 'othered?' (This is when a group of people who have power or authority narrowly define who qualifies as a full member of society or when those are othered are depicted as different, exotic, not belonging or needy.)

Step 2: Reflection

Draw together leaders of your church to ask and document responses to the questions that follow. Please remember that we do this in a spirit of curiosity and a desire to be humble followers of Jesus in the world. And so, we converse using two tools to govern our conversations:

- Respectful Communication Guidelines [see below]
- Mutual Invitation [see below]

Questions:

1. What cultures do our building, art works, website, newsletters and other forms of communication resemble and reflect?
2. If I was determining whether to visit this church solely from the images that we studied here, who might I expect will be welcomed and easily integrated into church life? For whom might this be a challenge, based solely on what we studied?
3. Do the images that we studied reflect our intent for our church from this moment forward? If so, why? If not, what must change to better reflect our intent?
4. What else do we need to learn about church history and national history to better understand how our images reinforce a narrative that conflates Christianity and whiteness?
5. What do we do from here? If your congregation is predominantly white, are you willing to study and dialogue on concepts of white privilege and power, or white ideology and its connection to the Christian faith? See the list of resources below and choose based on how you think your faith community will **enter** the dialogue.
6. If your congregation is predominantly BIPOC, are you willing to study and dialogue on concepts of colonization and the intersection of the Christian faith to Anti-Blackness/Anti-Brownness? Consider the list of resources below under Colonization/History of Race, understanding that each community has its unique story to be researched and engaged.
7. Don't forget that United Methodists dedicate a general agency of the church to this work. New resources on understanding and combatting racism are added frequently. Visit the [General Commission on Religion and Race](#) and click on 'resources.'

Additional studies related to decision-making processes, communication styles, budgeting, community relationships and partnership are in process to guide additional work in assessing the life and ministry of the church through intercultural and anti-racism lenses. Visit the [Greater Northwest Area website](#) and click on racism.

White Privilege/Anti-Racism Resources:

If your congregation has not engaged the term White Privilege, or if you sense some defensiveness about the term, consider these resources:

Waking Up White, Debby Irving.

[White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh](#)

If your congregation has engaged the term White Privilege and is curious to learn and understand more, consider these resources:

White Fragility, Robin DiAngelo.

White Awake, Daniel Hill.

[Implicit Bias Tests](#)

[Immaculate Perception](#), You Tube, Jerry Kang.

If your congregation is able to engage in difficult and nuanced conversations about power and privilege, and race and theology, consider these resources:

Unsettling Truths, Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah.

Dear White Christians, Jennifer Harvey.

Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?, Beverly Daniel Tatum.

I'm Still Here, Austin Channing Brown.

The New Jim Crow, Michelle Alexander.

How To Be an Anti-Racist, Ibram X. Kendi.

Southern Poverty Law Center [White ideology/White Supremacy/White Nationalism](#).

Watch and reflect together on: *Just Mercy*, the movie.

Colonization/History of Race:

If your congregation has suffered colonization, consider starting with these resources (not excluding others above)

[Historical Foundations of Race](#), National Museum of African American History and Culture. Smithsonian.

Unsettling Truths, Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah.
A Theology of Liberation, Gustavo Gutiérrez.
A Black Theology of Liberation, James H. Cone.
Many Colors, Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church, Soong-Chan Rah.
The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, Eric H. F. Law
[Implicit Bias Tests](#)
[Immaculate Perception](#), You Tube, Jerry Kang.

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 and who is wrong

The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed by Eric H. F. Law.

See <https://www.kscopeinstitute.org/ki-toolbox> for further explanation and additional languages

MUTUAL INVITATION

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, and to foster brave and safe space, we will proceed in the following manner:

A designated person will share first.

After sharing, he/she/they will invite another person to share.

Each person has three options in response to the invitation to speak:

- Share and invite.
- “Pass for now” and invite. The group will return to this person later.
- “Pass” and invite. When a person chooses to ‘pass,’ the group will respect the person’s decision and will not return to this person in this round.

Do this until everyone is invited remembering to return to those who ‘pass for now.’

Note: Only the person invited may speak. Save questions or connections until after Mutual Invitation has concluded.

The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, by Eric H. F. Law. See <https://www.kscopeinstitute.org/ki-toolbox> for further explanation and additional languages