

## Importance of Anti-Racism Work



Bishop Bard, during the 2021 Annual Conference, issued the following challenge:

*"I invite every Michigan United Methodist congregation to engage in a study in the coming year dealing with intercultural competence, racism, or racial reckoning."*

The issue of race has been present and has been an issue of concern from the beginning of Methodism's foundation in the United States. In his letter to [William Wilberforce](#), John Wesley wrote, "I was particularly struck by that circumstance that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a "law" in our colonies that the *oath* of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this?"

The [Social Principles](#) of the United Methodist Church recognize the need for ongoing work to address both personal and institutional racism: "Therefore, we recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons. We rejoice in the gifts that particular ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life. We commit as the Church to move beyond symbolic expressions and representative models that do not challenge unjust systems of power and access."

As individual churches, we have an obligation to be a healing force within our culture. The work of healing is preceded by the work of justice, and justice requires that we critically examine existing power structures and unequal relationships between racial groups in order to understand our role in these. In order to guide the churches in the Michigan Conference in the work of addressing racism, Bishop Bard has formed a [working group](#) to respond and take seriously a call to address the ways we perpetuate bias and racism.

The hope of Bishop Bard's challenge is to move the Michigan Conference more decidedly in the direction of the Beloved Community, which the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. described as requiring "a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives." The hope is that all churches within the Michigan Conference will join in this work of creating a new kind of community in Jesus Christ—one that dismantles racism, breaks down dividing walls, and serves as a healing force in our divided world.

## What to Expect with Anti-Racism Work

Antiracism is lifetime work. However, it doesn't take a lifetime to become antiracist—someone who actively opposes racism in all forms, including within themselves. But it is a process and we are always learning more along the way. Here are some important considerations about what to expect as you engage in anti-racism work:

1. This process will take time. Humility and perseverance are key.
2. Your first thought may be, “I’m not qualified to lead this effort.” But often spaces to discuss anti-racism have been started by someone who was hesitant at first. Being the leader does not necessarily mean that you are the expert—it does mean that you will gently take responsibility to keep things on track with the fundamental goal: to learn more and talk about race and racism—together in community.
3. Racism is an emotional topic. We all have feelings about it—across all racial identities. Racism is not simply misinformation that is easily corrected by getting accurate information—it persists because it is so rooted in emotions. Anticipate and acknowledge emotions. Give space and time for reflection on your own emotions.
4. Expect the conversations to be uncomfortable and prepare for disagreement. Don't end engagement at the first sign of discomfort.
5. This process will look different for White individuals and People of Color. All racial groups are affected by White supremacy and societal messaging about race, but unpacking this will look different for different racial identities.
6. Resistance to new ideas is natural, but must be addressed. Unmanaged, resistance can block progress. When we manage resistance, we widen our potential to have helpful conversations about difficult issues. When we handle our resistance, we remain open to God doing a new thing with, for, or through us.
7. Let missteps develop, not derail, the dialogue. We acknowledge that we are human and flawed, and missteps are developmental. Missteps are a part of the process and open the door for accountability, acknowledgment, an authentic apology, open dialogue, and the opportunity to try again.
8. Not all those who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color will have the same experiences of racism or same desire for engagement on this matter.
9. Don't think you have to do this alone. Consult resources and research, and connect with colleagues and those within the conference who are doing this work.

Some resources on having conversations about race with other people and with congregations:

[7 Ways to Have a Conversation About Racial Justice](#)

[Talking About Race: 10 Ways to Have Meaningful Conversations](#)

[How to have helpful conversations about race in the church](#)

### **Best Practices for Anti-Racism Work**

The National Plan of Hispanic Ministry of the United Methodist Church taught, for many years, a process called “See. Discern. Act.” Based on the practices of Latin American base ecclesial communities in the late 20th century, it was a circular design process for creating new ministries centered in community, grounded in empathy and discernment, focused on action, and attentive to reflection in order to begin the next round of ministry. It is helpful model for starting any new ministry initiative.

#### Community

- Gather a Team -- gather at least two or three other people to be your core team.

#### See

- Honestly assess and prayerfully discern the readiness of your team and your congregation/community.
- Be aware of what is already happening in your community and who you might partner with.

#### Discern

- Establish the “why” for your work? Why are we doing this? What is our goal?
- Choose to engage anti-racism in way that does good, does no harm, and stays in love with God. Ask honestly, “what is our congregation ready for?”

#### Act

- Do Something. Once you discern the best way to engage and have a plan, get started.
- Be clear in your invitation and communication to participants.
- Be prepared to “pivot” and change direction, approach, focus as needed.

#### Prepare for the Next Round

- Reflect on what you experienced, learned, felt.
- Repeat the process to determine the next step in your journey.

## Taking the First Step

If you determine your congregation is ready to have a conversation about race and racism, and this is the first time your congregation has engaged in this work, we recommend Discipleship Ministries' [Courageous Conversation About Race](#) resource.

A few steps on the journey

- [Racial Justice Conversation Guide](#)
- [8 Ways Church Leaders Can Move the Conversation Forward](#)

A few steps further on the journey

- [Meaningful Conversations About Race](#)
- [Building the Beloved Community](#)
- [Preaching Courageously Against Racism](#)
- [Equity vs. Equality: Understanding the Differences](#)
- [UMC Racial Justice Timeline](#)
- [United Methodist Women Racial Justice Manual](#)
- [5 Ideas for Stewardship for Churches Seeking to be Actively Anti-Racist](#)
- [Praying for Change: Daily Prayers for Anti-Racism](#)
- [Called to Witness, Care, and Act: A Message for Laity in The United Methodist Church](#)
- [De-Colonizing the Church: A Commitment to Anti-Racism \(Webinar Series\)](#)

Often, predominantly White congregations feel they are unable to take the first step because there are no people of color in their congregation to engage in this conversation. Or there may be a desire to invite a person of color to come and lead this conversation. To place the burden of this work on people of color, whether members or outside leaders, can be harmful. Every church, regardless of the racial makeup of their membership, can engage in anti-racism work.

## Let Us Know How You Participated

Please complete [this survey](#) to let the Anti-Bias Anti-Racism Working Group know how you participated in this challenge.

## Further Assistance

If you are in need of further assistance or would like to talk with someone about this work, Anti-Bias Anti-Racism Working Group members have made themselves available. Please complete [this form](#) and a member will be in contact with you.

**An Invitation to Brave Space**  
by Micky ScottBey Jones

Together we will create *brave space*.  
Because there is no such thing as a “space space” –  
We exist in the real world.  
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.  
In this space  
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,  
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,  
We call each other to more truth and love.  
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.  
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.  
We will not be perfect.  
This space will not be perfect.  
It will not always be what we wish it to be.  
But  
It will *be our brave space together*,  
*and*  
*We will work on it side by side.*