

Participant's Guide

FAITHFUL LENT

CONNECTING THE PRACTICES OF LENT AND ANTI-RACISM

Produced by The General Commission on Religion and Race of The United Methodist Church

WELCOME

WELCOME TO FAITHFUL LENT: CONNECTING THE PRACTICES OF LENT AND ANTI-RACISM. This guide includes all of the content, worksheets, and when printed, space for note-taking and journaling you will need. To get the most out of the study, consider looking over materials ahead of time for the coming week. For example, before starting class each week, check the "Materials Needed" list to ensure you have what you need to participate in each session fully. You might want to locate and review online sources, links, and internet search assignment materials prior to, so as to have them readily available on hand. Another option might include reading the biblical text as part of your personal study or devotion, asking God to speak to you through scripture before engaging with it through the lenses of Lenten practice and the work of anti-racism. The General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) would like to thank you for your willingness to engage in the work of justice and anti-racism during the Lenten season. We are excited about how the faith traditions of Lent will bring justice and anti-racism to life within your context. Let's begin!

MATERIALS NEEDED

Overall

- Participant's Guide – either digitally or printed
- Zoom Link – created for group study if held virtually or as a hybrid

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INTRODUCTION TO FAITHFUL LENT

**CONNECTING THE PRACTICES OF LENT
AND ANTI-RACISM
SMALL GROUP STUDY**

The purpose of this small group study is to make explicit connections between the traditions of Lent and the work of anti-racism without forcing either one to be what they are not. This study has been created with the faith-filled assumption that when we take seriously our Lenten traditions and what is necessary for the work of anti-racism, we find the two complement each other, not compete. Thus, what results is anti-racism work which emerges faithfully from engaging in authentic and tradition-based Lenten practices. Much of this study is organized along worship-based categories such as scripture reading, scripture reflection, and prayer. Two categories which merit a quick description are the "Big Idea" and "Internalization" sections.

Reference to the "**Big Idea**" helps focus on the overarching piece of new information guiding each week's session. For this resource, the "Big Idea" focus is anti-racism, and might take the form of an idea, a definition, or a skill set. While the study includes ideas and practices from the season of Lent, it assumes the newest information or learning resides in how anti-racism work is done through the lens of how the Church understands and practices Lent.

"**Internalization**" can be defined as that which allows us to work with an idea, definition, or skill set in such a way that we can use it beyond the teaching moment. In other words, internalization allows us the opportunity to engage in reflection, exercises, or journaling in ways that help us transform what we study into what we know, and transform what we know into how we live.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

- **You do not have to use every section of this study**—especially with shorter class periods. The facilitator might choose between options within each session (they have been given notes as to how to ensure the main pieces are discussed and incorporated). Feel free to read through or engage in any section outside of class in which you find interest.
- **Use the "Anti-Racism Homework" section as homework** done between classes. For longer classes, the first 5 minutes of class might be set aside to do a quick share, or 1 or 2 participants might share a little more deeply their experience of one aspect of the homework. For shorter classes, a forum/platform where participants can share their experiences of the homework, brainstorm how to use what is learned in the larger church setting, or support each other in the work in between class periods might be set up (e.g., email, texts, or group chats).
- **"Scripture" and "Scripture Reflection" sections are set as a backdrop and foundation to the work of the class period.** If the class is interested in further work with these sections, a different class can be formed for this work (options could include: meeting on a different day; the same class working through the Scripture/Reflection sections after the Lenten season; having a biblical scholar lead classes which dive deeply into the Scripture/Reflection to create an actual Bible study which emerges from this introductory work).

- **Make as many explicit connections between Lenten practices and anti-racism as possible.** Consider using the “Lenten/Anti-Racism Connections Worksheet” to house the connections made throughout the study in one place. As you engage with each session and assigned homework, pay close attention to the connections you make between Lent and Anti-Racism. The worksheet can serve as a reminder and record of connections and practice to recognize them. A full list could be co-created by the class by the end of the study that can be used beyond the Lenten season.
- Remember, **facilitators are not expected to be experts on the material.** Rather, a facilitator's job is to support participants to engage as meaningfully as possible with the content, facilitating movement through the material in a way that creates pathways for participants to learn and grow together.

PARTICIPANT TIPS

KNOW YOURSELF. Before engaging in a discussion about race, it is important that you consider your own biases surrounding the topic. How have you come to know what you know or think what you think? Why have you valued some information or sources over others?

SET THE STAGE WITH COVENANT MAKING. In order for people to express their opinions and participate in group discussions about race, they need to feel there is a respectful space for diversity of expression and experiences. It is best to establish a supportive atmosphere for group discussion with agreed upon ground rules. Please take the time to develop a covenant with the group before engaging in deeper conversation.

PARTICIPANT GROUND RULES. Some rules to consider abiding by:

- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Respect one another, even when disagreeing with another's views.
- Critique ideas, not individuals.
- Commit to learning, not debating.
- Avoid blame and speculation.
- Ask for clarification without using it as a distraction technique to get off topic.
- Depending on how often you offer your perspectives during class, speak more or less often in order to allow for more people to participate in discussions.
- Allow the facilitator to facilitate.

FOSTER COMMUNITY. There is a good chance that discussions about race may become tense. The main goal of fostering community is to protect participants from feeling personally attacked. Make sure participants understand that it is okay to disagree, but keep comments focused on the ideas and not the people who share those ideas.

DIVERSITY. Value the diversity of all participants as an asset. Your actions affect the culture and climate of your discussion group. In a discussion group that truly values the contributions and differences of all participants, authentic opportunities for learning are nurtured and embraced by all persons.

EMOTIONAL RESPONSE. Emotional and tense moments may arise during discussions. Create space for the facilitator to assist the class here. Acknowledge there may be times when you, yourself, feel uncomfortable talking about an issue. Think carefully about what you want to say and allow the facilitator to help you do so honorably while you speak about your discomfort or share your personal thoughts and feelings about the discomfort you feel.

LENTEN/ANTI-RACISM CONNECTIONS WORKSHEET

As you work through FAITHFUL LENT: CONNECTING THE PRACTICES OF LENT AND ANTI-RACISM, write as many connections between Lenten practices and anti-racism work as they come up for you and the class (make copies of this worksheet to accommodate as many connections as possible).

Name the Connection	Describe the Connection (or the experience that made the connection real for you/the class)

LENT 1

REPENTANCE

MATERIALS NEEDED

- "Repentance Prayer Worksheet" – digital or printed
- "Make Real Worksheet" - digital or printed
- Optional: pens, markers, note-taking app

SCRIPTURE

Romans 6: 1-4 (NRSV)

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the [Creator], so we too might walk in newness of life.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Especially once we've learned how Christ Jesus lived and died working to free us from it, why would we choose to sin? The first readers of this text were struggling with how to understand a forgiving God's unconditional grace with the reality that humans still commit sin—that which denies, diminishes, or causes destruction to God's ultimate hope for any of God's creatures or creation. On the one hand, we know that God will forgive us when we mess up. On the other hand, we realize more and more the consequences of our sin to us, to our neighbors, and to our world. The writer of Romans pleads with us to take both seriously, but never to allow grace to give us permission to sin. Allowing ourselves to sin—just because God will forgive us—is a faulty mindset. It sets us up to believe that sin's consequences don't matter because we'll be forgiven. But they do matter. All sin has consequences whether we see them or not—whether they affect us directly or not. So, then, what are we to say? Grace is not an excuse to sin. Rather, grace recognizes our human need for forgiveness to help us keep fighting against sin—especially after we miss the mark.

MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

1 minute.

Notes:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God, we confess with our whole heart and mind and soul and body that we have sinned against You, our neighbor, our created goodness, and our world.

There are times when we have chosen sin,
or refused to stop sin,
because we rely too heavily on Your unconditional grace to forgive us.
Help us always, and everywhere,
to find creative and powerful ways to dismantle all sin
so that the harm and destruction it causes
shall be no more.

AMEN

ANTI-RACISM BIG IDEA

Anti-Racism Must Confront Racism – Anything Else Keeps Racism in Place.

INTERNALIZATION

Writer and U.S. ex-patriot James Baldwin said not everything that is faced can be changed, but that nothing can be changed unless it is faced. "Repentance" isn't merely some fancy faith word that allows us to repeat empty "I'm sorrys" to God and one another to receive blanket forgiveness and mercy. Repentance, rather, requires that we address sin head on and means to turn fully around. Repentance, in the truest sense then, means to figure out what needs to be done in order for something new to occur. The "sorrys" of repentance are just the first step signaling that we are intent upon making necessary changes. However, more is needed. True repentance demands actions that prove our apologies are more than just pretty words.

INTERNALIZATION IN ACTION

1. Take five (5) minutes to ask God to set your heart toward repentance. Yes, five minutes. Feel free to use the "Repentance Prayer Worksheet" as a guide and/or place to write, draw, or take notes. You may pray silently, write your prayers on paper, draw, or use a note-taking app.
2. Brainstorm as a group what makes an apology "real." What concrete things must occur when an apology becomes more than "just words"?

Notes:

- 3. Consider the following statement: "Our church hates how racism hurts People of Color. We want to fight racism but some of our people aren't ready." Then:
 - a. Name at least two ways this statement keeps the apology at the words-only level.
 - b. Rewrite the statement to apply what you've learned so far about repentance.

Notes:

**ANTI-RACISM
HOMEWORK**

Talk to Action Options

- 1. **OPTION ONE: (Use "Make Real Worksheet")**
 - a. What three steps would need to occur in order to "Make Real" your re-written statement above (3b)? Brainstorm and make note of the three (3) steps needed.
 - b. What needs to happen in order to make sure the three (3) steps actually happen? For example, how would you know (or someone else know) that the three (3) steps occurred? Is there a way to measure it? In other words, what kind of evidence would show your re-written statement has become "real"?
- 2. **OPTION TWO:**
 - a. How would you explain "repentance" to a child (5 years old, 10 years old, 15 years old)? In other words, how would you put what you learned in this lesson into your own words in a way that a child at different ages would understand it?
 - b. Consider how each of the age groups could participate in the three (3) steps that would make the re-written statement from the internalization section "real." In other words, how would you know (or someone else know) that the three (3) steps occurred? Is there a way to measure it?
 - c. Ask children of these different age groups to help you brainstorm what would make the re-written statement "real." What did they say differently? How would what they suggest work more faithfully or powerfully?
 - d. What part could they take in making the re-written statement "real"?

Notes:

SENDING FORTH

Eternal and Loving God, help us to recognize when our repentance falls short.
Help us to recognize when our words remain just words.
Help us please to learn how to transform our words of repentance into actions.
Give us the strength, the courage, and the will, to act upon the repentance
needed for real apologies.
AMEN.

LENT 1 - WORKSHEET

REPENTANCE PRAYER

Utilize the options below as guided by your spirit and the Holy Spirit during the set-aside five (5) minutes. You may use one, you may use them all. Feel free to draw, doodle, take notes, or otherwise on this worksheet.

Repeat, "God, lead me to true repentance."

Apologies to Others: for harm you did by your actions, inactions, words, or silence.

Apologies to God: for living in such a way that dishonors God's will for the world.

Apologies to Self: for believing lies of oppression instead of God's truth about you.

LENT 1 - WORKSHEET

MAKE REAL

What three (3) steps would need to occur in order to "Make Real" the re-written statement from 3b in the internalization section? In the left column, brainstorm and note the three steps. In the right column, note what needs to happen in order to make sure the three (3) "Make Real" steps actually happen. For example, how would you know (or someone else know) that the three (3) steps had occurred? Is there a way to measure it? What kind of evidence would you need?

STEP ONE

First step to make statement from #3b real.

How would you/someone else know?

STEP TWO

Second step to make statement from #3b real.

How would you/someone else know?

STEP THREE

Third step to make statement from #3b real.

How would you/someone else know?

LENT 2

RELEASE/GIVE UP

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Something to take notes on/with during the "Sending Forth" section

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 12: 1-2 (NRSV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

It's almost impossible to walk—let alone run—when we are carrying too much "weight." Imagine you are trying to carry five (5) heavy grocery bags from the store to your car and you don't have a cart. You figure out how to get all of the bags situated, but then two (2) of the bags fall because the handles break under the weight of the groceries. Now imagine you don't have a car, and you're struggling with five (5) bags, two (2) of which have no handles, and you're trying to reach the bus stop before the bus arrives. Now imagine you see the bus approaching while you are still across the parking lot. Now imagine you see the bus leaving and two (2) more bags fall because their straps have now broken. If it was just you, with no bags, perhaps you could have made it to your car or the bus much more easily. However, because you were attempting to carry the extra "weight" with you, the task became harder if not nearly impossible. Now imagine instead of groceries, which we need, the bags hold our sin.

MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

1 minute.

Notes:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God, we confess with our whole heart and mind and soul and body that we have sinned against You, our neighbor, our created goodness, and our world.

There are times when we have chosen sin,
or to carry our sin around with us
convincing ourselves we are still running a good race.

Bring to our mind the sins
we have convinced ourselves we do not commit.

Help us always, and everywhere,
find creative and powerful ways to set aside all of our sins
so that we are free to run the race you have laid out for us.

AMEN.

ANTI-RACISM BIG IDEA

Good Intentions are Not Enough to Fight Racism – Anti-Racism Focuses on Outcomes

INTERNALIZATION

Some of us have learned about or practiced Lent only by means of “giving something up” for six weeks. Traditions vary as to whether or not Sundays “count” and debates continue as to which version is the most faithful. Do we literally abstain for 40 days or do we retain our giving up practice until Easter? No matter the formulation, the focus is the same. In order to be faithful during Lent these traditions require letting go of something. The “letting go” of something represents a practice in which we rely on God during periods we would regularly rely on something else. If we give up a particular kind of food, or eating during a particular time of day, we take that time to pray, meditate, or seek God’s guidance. If we give up watching T.V. or using our phones or playing video games, we instead spend that time reconnecting with family and friends as a way to honor the relationships that God knows are good for us. Regardless of what we lay aside or restrict, the Lenten practice challenges us to shift our reliance, dependence, or even addiction to something toward our reliance upon God for something new. (Do you notice a theme growing between last week and this? Lenten practices lead to something new...)

**INTERNALIZATION
IN ACTION**

1. Invite 2 or 3 people to share briefly their past experiences of giving something up for Lent and what they learned from it.
2. Take five (5) minutes as a class to discuss what would help the good intentions of letting something go for Lent and the lessons one can learn from doing so actually become realized and continue beyond Lent.
3. Take five (5) minutes as a class to discuss what gets in the way of seeing those lessons/outcomes lived out beyond the season of Lent.

Notes:

4. Now think about the practice of fighting against racism. Rather than considering specific examples, think about it generally. For example, does meeting about fighting against racism result in fighting against racism? What resistance comes up when suggestions for fighting against racism are raised? Considering this, think about how many people—especially white people—rely only on “good intentions” to do something, instead of ensuring the outcome of fighting against racism. Options for thinking about this might include:
 - a. In what ways is this like having “good intentions” to give something up during Lent and whether the lessons/outcomes continue beyond Lent?
 - b. In what ways is this related to the fragile relationship between “intentions” and “outcomes” the class discussed earlier in prompts #2 and #3?

Notes:

ANTI-RACISM HOMEWORK

Talk to Action Options

1. During the coming week, make note of every time you excuse or explain away acts of personal or system racism based on what you believe is someone's good intentions, rather than examining the outcome/s.
*** For white people, this can also include the following:
 - a. Excusing your own thoughts and actions that perpetuate racism.
 - b. Remaining silent when you've noticed something racist happening.
2. Ask yourself why you excused it. The why is important because it focuses us on what "weight" stands in the way of us fighting against racism. For some of us, our "why" stems from the fear of standing up to our boss. For some of us, our "why" stems from the exhaustion of always being looked at as the one who has to call out racism when it happens.
3. Which "weight" do you want to practice setting aside this week? Note how it goes.

SENDING FORTH

1. Ask each person to write a two (2) to four (4) sentence prayer, asking God to help them give up their addiction¹ to relying on good intentions. Think about the following:
 - a. Consider when you have excused yourself or others from fighting against racism because of "good intentions."
 - b. For those here last week, remember how true repentance goes beyond "pretty word" apologies and makes apologies "real." (If you weren't here last week, consider what makes an apology "real" to you. Consider this in light of what might make the outcomes of fighting against racism "real" for its direct targets, People of Color.)

Notes:

2. As the facilitator says, "Jesus, help us," each person is invited to read their prayer. Facilitator ends the prayer by saying, "God, break our temptations to rely on good intentions, and focus us on outcomes."

¹ Often the term "addiction" is reduced to referring only to substance/drug abuse. However, here, "addiction" is intentionally used to help us think about anything that we continue to think, value, or act upon despite negative consequences to us or others.

LENT 3

TAKE ON/DEVELOP

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to the internet for Internalization #2
- Optional: pens, markers, paper, sand, sand rakes, moldable clay, or yarn and crochet hooks

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 6:10-17 (NRSV)

Finally, be strong in the LORD and in the strength of [God's] power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

As we face the harsh realities of sin—ours and that of others—it can feel overwhelming. How is it that every time we want to make a change or try to make a change, it seems like it gets harder rather than easier? Our text for today offers that we face not just what we can see—because sin and evil have a spiritual, cosmic element. Fighting sin and evil requires specific armor and tools of God, because human tools alone are no match for that which also has a spiritual component. But the text doesn't give us a spiritual-sounding plan that patiently waits for heaven's perfection or God's intervention to come. Even though part of this fight is spiritual, the tools of armor are specifically designed for the real, earthly work it takes to do it.

MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

1 minute.

Note:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God, we confess with our whole heart and mind and soul and body that we have sinned against You, our neighbor, our created goodness, and our world.

There are times when we have chosen sin,
or been overwhelmed by its harsh realities and consequences.

Forgive us for every time we have relied on You to intervene
without also doing the work ourselves.

Help us always, and everywhere,
find creative and powerful ways to pick up and use the tools
we have and that You give us to dismantle all sin
within and without.

AMEN.

ANTI-RACISM BIG IDEA

It's Not Enough to Do No Harm – We Must Also Do Good.

INTERNALIZATION

Methodism's father, John Wesley, is known for "3 Simple Rules" for Christian discipleship: Do No Harm, Do Good, and Stay in Love with God. These instructions sound great, sure—but have you ever asked yourself why both "doing no harm" and "doing good" are included? Isn't "doing no harm" also "doing good"? And, if we "do good" we're not doing harm, correct? Yes.... and no. Sometimes doing no harm avoids harm. However, just because we avoid harm doesn't mean harm isn't still occurring. It also might mean that we benefit from harm that is still occurring: for example, one might benefit from the harm that is happening to other people. Therefore, "doing good" would indicate we must also do something to counter the harm. It isn't enough to merely avoid doing harm or to stand by silently while harm is happening. We must both "give up" (do no harm) and "pick up" (do good).

During Lent, however, it is easy to get caught up in the "giving up" of things, practices, or habits and forget that repentance is more than pretty words, but also requires developing a new practice or new way of life. (Notice, the theme of Lent as a time for bringing about something new is still building!) In terms of racism, it is not enough for an individual, group, or community not to commit certain types of racism. In fact, merely doing nothing permits the systems of racism to remain, to embed, and to strengthen within our current policies and practices. We must also develop our character and capabilities toward the doing good of anti-racism versus relying on the myths which try to convince us that avoiding racism is ever enough. Discuss these questions.

**INTERNALIZATION
IN ACTION**

1. How would you explain the difference between “doing no harm” and “doing good” to someone who hasn’t heard of those concepts before?

Notes:

2. Search the internet for tips on how one creates a new and ongoing habit. Brainstorm together what you discovered by discussing the following:
 - a. How is a new habit formed?
 - b. How long does it take?
 - c. What helps new habits stick?

Notes:

3. Take five (5) minutes of prayer time to ask God how your church has avoided the work of fighting against racism. What harms of racism have you allowed to continue in your congregation and surrounding community? Use the time in silent prayer, journaling/notetaking, drawing/doodling, or using a tactile practice (molding clay, handling or sifting or raking sand, or crocheting) if this helps you to focus your thoughts.

**ANTI-RACISM
HOMEWORK**

Talk to Action Options

1. Choose one anti-racist habit to “pick up” during (and beyond) Lent and use what you’ve learned in #2 above to make it stick. (i.e., interrupt a racist joke, or, if you’re a Person of Color, enact self-care when it is more important and needed than fighting against the specific racism of the moment)
2. Commit part of your personal or church budget to give directly (without directives) to a caucus, congregation, or organization led by and supporting People of Color.

- 3. Transfer some or all of your bank accounts and banking business to a Black-owned bank as one way to enact racialized economic redistribution necessary to counter centuries of anti-Black economic discrimination and the explicit and implicit legacy of enslavement.
- 4. For white dominant or all white churches, [contract with GCORR](#)¹ for anti-racism training to help your church prepare to receive a Pastor of Color.
- 5. Read, ["How to be a better Anti-Racist" written by the Rev. Laquaan Malachi](#).² What one thing from that article can you start doing immediately? Start this week.
- 6. Give money to fund a scholarship which directly supports Students and Scholars of Color at your local seminary.

Note:

SENDING FORTH

View ["The Ascent"](#)³ by John Swanson while reflecting on his description of the piece found below:

"Every person is a universe. We all have great capacity to continue growing and developing during our short time here on earth. Every step, and rung of the ladder, is the dreamer's gradual ascent from each of [their] life experiences and lessons. As [one] climbs the ladder, the dreamer is supported, encouraged, and guided by the angels."

FACILITATOR CLOSSES PRAYER SAYING

"LORD, help us to pick up exactly what we need to be anti-racist." AMEN.

1 <https://www.gcorr.org/services>
 2 <https://www.minnesotaumc.org/blogdetail/being-a-better-anti-racist-14027342>
 3 <https://tinyurl.com/JohnAugustAscent>

LENT 4

CHOOSING A SIDE

MATERIALS NEEDED

- "Choosing a Side Worksheet"
- "Choosing a Side HOMEWORK Worksheet"
- Denominational or congregational baptismal ritual (or other ritual which explains our call to justice work or fighting against oppression)

SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 30: 19-20
(NRSV)

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying [God], and holding fast to [God]; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

We've all known good people to whom bad things have happened, such as a death that has come too early. Our text does not shield faithful people from death or all bad experiences. Rather, the text lays out two very different ways of going about living. To choose death, means to live in ways that bring harm, destruction, and selfish gain at the expense of others, to exploit. To choose life, means to live in ways that create safety, community, and surviving and flourishing for everyone. Loving and obeying God mean more than simply following a set of rules. Doing so, instead, requires choosing the kind of life and living which represents the character and will of God, in order to build a sustainable society of justice which never sacrifices some for others.

MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

1 minute.

Note:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God, we confess with our whole heart and mind and soul and body that we have sinned against You, our neighbor, our created goodness, and our world.

There are times when we have chosen to live in ways that only benefit us or those we know, that destroy rather than create thriving, that privilege us at the expense of others.

Help us always, and everywhere, find creative and powerful ways to choose life not in superficial following of rules but in choosing Your ways and Your will.

AMEN.

ANTI-RACISM BIG IDEA

Racism is Not Consistent with Following Christ. Period.

INTERNALIZATION

Theologian Walter Brueggemann, in his book, *Prophetic Imagination*, argues that following Christ demands choosing a worldview. On one side, the world is a place where competition, selfishness, and greed reign – a zero-sum game that presumes as true that, one person must have less in order for another to have enough or more. On the other side—the side on which God presides—the world is a place where the need for oppression is no longer presumed or protected. Rather, all people and creation flourish without harming anyone or anything else in order to do so. Dr. Brueggemann argues that those of us who proclaim to follow Christ are called to choose one side or the other, and then work with all our might to co-create that world with God. Lent provides us with a time for critical reflection and practice by which we can decide with purpose the side in which we will place our energy, our time, our resources, and even our character. Choosing is important, for (as the perennial wisdom reminds us) if we don't choose for ourselves, someone will choose for us.

**INTERNALIZATION
IN ACTION**

"Choosing A Side
Worksheet"

1. Take three (3) minutes to reflect on how your understanding of Lent is enhanced by Brueggemann's suggestion that following Christ demands choosing a side.
2. For the next 3-5 minutes, as group, share your thoughts with each other.
3. What is scary about having to choose a side?
4. Review your denomination's or congregation's baptismal ritual (or any other faith-based ritual that calls us to fight against evil or oppression). Name the specific ways this ritual is calling you to choose a side (you should be able to point to the text and say here it is calling me to fight injustice by... or because...).
5. How does the identity formed by this ritual/practice demand fighting against racism?
 - a. Replace words like "oppression" or "evil" with the word "racism." Since racism is oppression and evil, this does not force anything into the text that isn't already there.
 - b. Read the reworded sentences of the ritual again.
 - c. How do you understand your Christian identity as anti-racist because of this ritual?
6. Hold your newly understood identity next to what you have done or not done so far to fight against racism. How do they stack up? If you were assessed today, would your work as an anti-racist provide evidence of your Christian/baptismal identity? Discuss with each other your revelations, your reactions to these questions, and your immediate next concern.

Note:

ANTI-RACISM HOMEWORK

Talk to Action Options

1. Read Exodus 1 (the story of the midwives).
2. Describe with specificity the dilemma the midwives faced. What were their choices?
3. Which alternative did the midwives choose? And why? (look in the text)
4. What were the risks they took in making their final choice?
5. What risks might you face in order to fight against racism?
6. Explain why you will fight against racism. Your reasons need to be strong enough to stand up to the risks involved.
7. In the coming week, make note of any opportunities you have to fight against racism, and identify what choices you faced in each situation. (e.g., say or do something, stay silent, walk away, something else?)
8. If you don't find opportunities this week, ask why that is. Is it because there is no opportunity, no racism in your surroundings, or because you don't yet recognize racism or anti-racism well enough to know there is a choice?

SENDING FORTH

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

The king said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."

Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh.

But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live."

But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.

So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?"

The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them."

So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, God gave them families.

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

FACILITATOR PRAYS

"God, help each of us to have the courage of the midwives, to make the choices that need to be made, even when we have to stand up to the most powerful people to do so." AMEN.



CHOOSING A SIDE

1. Take three (3) minutes to reflect on how your understanding of Lent is enhanced by Brueggemann's suggestion that following Christ demands choosing a side.
2. For the next 3-5 minutes, as group, share your thoughts with each other.
3. What is scary about having to choose a side?

4. Review your denomination's or congregation's baptismal ritual (or any other faith-based ritual that calls us to fight against evil or oppression). Name the specific ways this ritual is calling you to choose a side (you should be able to point to the text and say here it is calling me to fight injustice by... or because...).

5. How does the identity formed by this ritual/practice demand fighting against racism?
 - a. Replace words like "oppression" or "evil" with the word "racism." Since racism is oppression and evil, this does not force anything into the text that isn't already there.

- b. Read the reworded sentences of the ritual again.

- c. How do you understand your Christian identity as anti-racist because of this ritual?

6. Hold your newly understood identity next to what you have done or not done so far to fight against racism. How do they stack up? If you were assessed today, would your work as an anti-racist provide evidence of your Christian/baptismal identity? Discuss with each other your revelations, your reactions to these questions, and your immediate next concern.

CHOOSING A SIDE HOMEWORK

1. Read Exodus 1 (the story of the midwives).

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

The king said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."

Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh.

But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

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Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

Exodus 1:8-20 (NRSV)

2. Describe with specificity the dilemma the midwives faced. What were their choices?

3. Which alternative did the midwives choose? And why? (look in the text)

4. What were the risks they took in making their final choice?

5. What risks might you face in order to fight against racism?

6. Explain why you will fight against racism. Your reasons need to be strong enough to stand up to the risks involved.

7. In the coming week, make note of any opportunities you have to fight against racism, and identify what choices you faced in each situation. (e.g., say or do something, stay silent, walk away, something else?)

8. If you don't find opportunities this week, ask why that is. Is it because there is no opportunity, no racism in your surroundings, or because you don't yet recognize racism or anti-racism well enough to know there is a choice?

LENT 5

GIVING ALMS

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to the internet (for internalization section #3)

SCRIPTURE

1 Timothy 6: 9-10 (NRSV)

But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Over time, this text has been interpreted to mean that money, in and of itself, is the root of all evil. This has caused concern for faithful Christians as to what constitutes too much money or what it means to love money. Since we don't want to commit evil, we figure out how to distance ourselves from money and vilify the rich. However, what if we look at the text with the interpretive lenses we've used in this study already? First, a closer reading reveals that it is not money, but a love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil. Thus, loving money (whatever that means) can bring about forms of evil (versus money as the same thing as evil itself). Second, the desire to be rich is associated with desires that bring ruin, pain, and destruction and can lead some people away from the faith. Considering these, what if we thought of this as a problem of choosing a worldview that represents life versus death? Love of money represents the desire to be rich which will expense others' lives for the sake of one's own. Money is not in and of itself destructive. The love of money creates a desire so strong in some that they will choose money instead of choosing God's worldview which allows for and works so that everyone may survive and thrive. What is needed is a way to use money that leads to life and not to death—for everyone.

MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

1 minute.

Note:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God, we confess with our whole heart and mind and soul and body that we have sinned against You, our neighbor, our created goodness, and our world.

There are times when we have chosen to love money and to desire being rich so much that we choose whatever it takes for us to be rich, no matter the cost to anyone else.

Help us always, and everywhere, find creative and powerful ways to use but not love money and to choose the well-being of all over our selfish gain.

AMEN.

ANTI-RACISM BIG IDEA

Anti-Racism Demands Repairing the Harm

INTERNALIZATION

A well-known Lenten practice is to "give alms." Giving money or resources or charity addresses immediate needs for those who suffer. This practice is important and needed. Hungry people need food. People without a secure place to live need consistent and reliable housing. People with medical needs must place survival needs above all else. Lent has historically provided a time for Christians to remember our baptism (another connection!). In doing so, we are invited by God to identify places in our lives where we have become self-focused and to make and implement specific plans to place our focus outward. One way we do that is through giving of money or our own resources. Often (if not always), we are quite attached to money and the things we have, so that one obvious way to discover what we are attached to for our SELF is to challenge our attachment to money. During Lent, giving alms does at least two things: [a] it attends to the immediate needs of those who suffer, and [b] it reduces our attachment to money/things and our focus on ourselves to the exclusion of others.

**INTERNALIZATION
IN ACTION**

1. Recall and share with the group some of the giving practices you have observed during past Lenten seasons. For example, giving a special offering in addition to your tithe, donating to a local homeless shelter, offering a one-time gift to a scholarship fund, volunteering (giving) your time at a non-profit organization, or others. After the group has shared, add some that you practice on an ongoing basis.

- 2. For anti-racism to occur, giving must take on a different purpose. It must address the harm that racism has created. Think about the giving practices from number 1. Which ones specifically address the harm caused by racism and which do not. What changes would you have to make to have the giving practices address racialized harm?
- 3. Search the internet for examples of the economic harm and injustice that racism has caused in the past and present. Examples:
 - a. median household incomes by race in the United States;
 - b. rates of unemployment by racial categories;
 - c. the current financial value of Manhattan in New York compared with the \$24 that white settlers allegedly paid Native Americans to buy it.

Note:

- 4. Make a list of what you find (in chat if virtual).
- 5. Consider together the difference between "giving more because you have more than enough" and "paying back what you shouldn't have had in the first place" in light of your list.
- 6. What connections between the Lenten practice of giving alms and anti-racism giving can you make based on what you've discovered in this exercise? (Consider numbers 2 and 5 specifically)

Note:

**ANTI-RACISM
HOMEWORK**

Talk to Action Options

- 1. OPTION ONE:
 - a. Create or join an anti-racism economic taskforce. Read Ta-Nehisi Coates' article, "[The Case for Reparations](#)"¹ in The Atlantic magazine.
 - b. Based on the article, what three (3) things will your church/group do to repair the economic harm of racism in your community?

Notes:

- 2. OPTION TWO:
 - a. Create a church/group-wide challenge to switch the language of "charity" or "sharing" to that of "paying back" (for white-dominant or all-white groups) or "paying forward" (for groups that are numerically deeply diverse as to race, ethnicity, and lived cultural experiences).
 - b. Learn about the National African-American Reparation Commission's (NAARC) Reparations Plan [here](#)².
 - c. Solicit every class member to share how the switch in language from 2a above changed how they worked on anti-racism during Lent. Post this, publicly.

SENDING FORTH³

God of Justice,
 Despite the forced labor and terror inflicted upon Black people since this country's inception,
 Despite the "malicious destruction of thriving business districts like 'Black Wall Street' in Tulsa and towns like Rosewood by (w)hite terrorist attacks,"
 Despite the "systemic strangulation of Black towns like Hayti, North Carolina; Urban Renewal ('Negro removal') programs that gutted Black business districts in numerous cities and towns,"
 Despite the "discriminatory lending policies which denied Black businesses the capital needed to survive and develop on a competitive basis,"

1 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>
 2 <https://reparationscomm.org/reparations-plan/>
 3 This prayer was crafted using the language found on NAARC's website describing the call of and need for economic redistribution under its Reparation Plan. What is NAARC's 10-Point Reparations Plan? (reparationscomm.org) accessed September 25, 2021.

Through economic redistribution and reparations, we can create racialized economic equity.

During this season of Lent, guide, challenge, and quicken our convictions and will and courage such that we continue to look for and engage economic anti-racism in specific and strategic ways.

May we never again confuse "giving" and "sharing" with what it will take to create racial economic justice. Be quick to chastise us when we do. Be quick to bring us to Your miraculous ways of Your Kin-dom made evident – even right now.

AMEN.



LENT 6

RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

MATERIALS NEEDED

none

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 5: 17-20
(NRSV)

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to [God's self] through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to [God's own self], not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making [the divine] appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

This verse helps us to see how God creates a way for right relationship with humans, and helps us to create pathways for humans to build right relationships with God. God creates miraculously "right" relationships with us even though we have sinned and create an unbridgeable gap between us and the divine. God determines the parameters by which we (those who have done harm) can come into right relationship. Lent offers us the opportunity to restart, retain, restore, or recommit to our relationship with God with practices including prayer, service, shifting priorities, giving, and repairing the harm done by individual and communal sin. These practices help us repent and turn away from that which damages relationships in order to be in relationship with God in a "right"eous way.

MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

1 minute.

Note:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God, we confess with our whole heart and mind and soul and body that we have sinned against You, our neighbor, our created goodness, and our world.

There are times when we have broken our relationship with You in ways that only You can teach us how to repair.

Forgive us for daring to suggest that we who are the ones who have damaged our relationship with You would be the ones to decide what's needed to fix it.

Help us always and everywhere to find creative and powerful ways to restore our relationship with You in the ways You know can make things right.

AMEN.

ANTI-RACISM BIG IDEA

Anti-Racism Builds Responsible Relationships Across Lines of Racial Difference

INTERNALIZATION

There are anti-racist ways to build relationships across lines of racial difference. However, even with the best intentions (remember, week two, "release / give up"), racism can get in the way of this outcome. Often in white-only or largely white groups or organizations, the goal of "diversity" is reduced to what is needed for a to-do list to be considered complete versus the development of honorable relationships among people of different racial identities. For example, a white church invites a local Church of Color to come share a meal with them Sunday afternoon after their respective services. Each church brings food, and they engage in a potluck style meal to get to know one another better. However, what happens many times is rather than sharing basic get-to-know-you information with each other to build actual friendships, white people will use this opportunity to ask People of Color to teach them about racism or to tell them they have not committed racism in a particular scenario (or that they are forgiven for doing so "unintentionally"). Worse still are invitations that change the invitation's expectations or requirements for time together only after the People of Color have shown up, instructing table conversations to begin with People of Color sharing their stories of racialized terror and white people passively listening.

Building relationships across lines of racial difference cannot be responsibly engaged if they exploit People of Color just so white people can learn stuff. These are not relationships at all. They simply replicate racism by reinforcing the inequity sustained when white people risk less and demand more labor from People of Color—sometimes simply because they have decided racism or anti-racism is important to them.

**INTERNALIZATION
IN ACTION**

- 1. List ways your group/church has tried to create right relationships across lines of racial difference. How, if at all, do these explicitly address repair after racialized harm?

Notes:

- 2. **Facilitator Reads:** Seeing that God is the one who is making the relationship right again with those who have done harm—and God presents the possibility of it happening at all—we can assert that People of Color, those who are harmed by racism, are those who determine which pathways can create right relationship with white folks. That being so, create a list of ways People of Color have said how right relationships can be created with white folks.

Notes:

- 3. Note differences between list #1 and #2. Which new things will your group/church do to create right relationships in a responsible way?

Notes:

**ANTI-RACISM
HOMEWORK**

Talk to Action Options

- 1. Develop a plan for enacting 3 of the items collected from list #2. Where does your group/church need to start?
 - a. For mostly or all-white groups, what specifically will your group do to ensure you aren't forcing or demanding a group of People of Color to "make nice" with you and follow your timeline and pathway? How will you ensure the pathway is right to the group who has been harmed by racism?
 - b. For People of Color, how will you determine which white and other People of Color groups you will build relationships with across lines of racial difference? How will you protect yourself from further racialized harm from groups who have exploited you? What strategies will you engage to build responsible relationships across lines of racial difference that honor your knowledge of how to do so in responsible ways?

Notes:

- 2. Choose from the following list your group's next faithful step (or steps) based on the place in the journey your group is starting from:
 - a. What examples of right relationships across lines of racial difference can you find to serve as models?
 - b. How can you learn how to find additional right relationship models?
 - c. How would you know that these are life-giving pathways according to the groups who have been harmed by racism?
 - d. How can you incorporate teaching the group or church about these models in worship, group study, or other educational gatherings or platforms?

Notes:



RELIGION & RACE

The United Methodist Church

www.gcorr.org