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***Fifty Years Later: The State of Racism in America***

***Discussion Guide***

“Let us dream of a world where every family, language, people, and nation is gathered in the commonwealth of God.” — Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori at the groundbreaking public forum *Fifty Years Later: The State of Racism in America*.

On November 15, The Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Mississippi hosted a live forum, *Fifty Years Later: The State of Racism in America*. Videos of the forum are now available on The Episcopal Church website: <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/state-racism>.

The forum begins with opening remarks from Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, followed by two panel discussions featuring distinguished speakers from across the country and moderated by television journalist Ray Suarez.

## video 1: “why does racism persist?”

Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori opens the first video with her keynote address, asking the questions, “Will you be vigilant, and watch for the morning? Will you seek after justice, encouraging others to join you on this road?” She calls Episcopalians to action to bring an end to racism in our society.

Following the keynote address is a short video on the history of racism in Mississippi.

While many Americans might like to think that racism no longer exists in their communities or in their lives, evidence suggests otherwise. “De facto” discrimination is discrimination that exists where discriminatory practices aren’t legal, but are actual discriminatory practices of government or society. De facto segregation in our communities, manifest in the lack of reasonable access to public services, equal educational opportunities, exposure to environmental hazards, and in interpersonal dealings, are ways in which society continues to discriminate against some of its members, often along racial or ethnic lines.

This panel discussion seeks to raise awareness of the fact that racism in America continues to thrive, and explores the underlying reasons that it does.

Panelists:

- The Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina
- Ms. Myrlie Evers-Williams, civil rights activist and journalist, and widow of civil rights leader Medgar Evers
- The Hon. William F. Winter, former governor of Mississippi and founder of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation

## video 2: “where is there hope for change?”

The panel on this second video recognizes that within every human heart, God is present; yet we need help in unlocking God’s presence to overcome inherent beliefs that may be racist.

A key to begin that process, some believe, is in understanding that racism does exist in America. The panelists, through their own life experiences and groundbreaking work, will share amazing stories, rooted in faith and society, of people and places where a true difference is being made in changing society’s norms on racism and discrimination.

The panel summarizes, on a hopeful note, with examples of how individuals and faith groups can “pass the torch” through their actions to end racism in their own communities.

Panelists:

- The Hon. Byron Rushing, Massachusetts state representative, civil rights leader, and vice president of The Episcopal Church’s House of Deputies
- Dr. Randy Testa, author and vice president of education at Walden Media, LLC
- Dr. Erma J. Vizenor, chairwoman of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, educator, and community organizer
- Tim Wise, educator and author of *White Like Me*, *Colorblind*, and *Affirmative Action*

## how to use this guide

This curriculum has been designed to accompany viewing of these videos in faith communities across The Episcopal Church. The discussions and exercises included are appropriate for 6<sup>th</sup> grade through adulthood.

Before using this curriculum in a group, facilitators should:

- Preview the videos and review each of the activities prior to meeting with the group.
- Decide whether to use this curriculum in one or two sessions.
- Decide whether to watch the entire panel discussions or use the time stamps listed to watch relevant highlights. It is suggested that you view the Presiding Bishop’s keynote address in its entirety.
- Consider recent local examples of race-related issues and events that can be incorporated into the conversation. This will help make the discussion both more real and more relevant.

## conversation guidelines

Set a relaxed and open tone. Use an icebreaker to encourage everyone’s participation and help create an inclusive atmosphere.

Stress the importance of confidentiality. Make sure your youth understand that what they say during the conversation is to be kept completely confidential. Define what “confidential” means. For instance, it is not all right to speak outside of the event about what someone else said or did; but it is all right to share one’s own personal insights about the issue of race and racism as a result of the process.

Guide the conversation, but don’t control it. Your role is not to come to some kind of conclusion. Your role is to monitor the comfort level of the room. Many things can affect this atmosphere:

- A participant who talks too much

- A participant who says something insensitive without it being acknowledged
- A participant who argues on opinions, igniting a “Crossfire”-like debate
- A participant who starts looking for the “right” opinion or idea instead of hearing out all voices
- Stereotypes or assumptions that are presented as facts (even positive stereotypes)

Allow all voices to be heard. From the outset, let the participants know the kind of environment you’re trying to provide, and ask for their help in allowing all voices to be heard. Consider reading the above list aloud to the group.

Acknowledge that race and racism is personal. Because of this, encourage participants to speak from the “I” perspective. The other participants and facilitators want to hear about your experience. Please note: “I” statements are not “I want to tell you about something that happened to my uncle.” “I” statements are personal, first-hand stories.

Acknowledge that when talking about race, people are sensitive, and there is the potential for unpredictable “pain points.” You can never predict what triggers pain in another person; you can only see its effects. There should be absolutely no judgment about whether an individual’s pain is valid. In fact, recognizing an individual’s pain is an important part of the conversation, allowing people to feel as if they are being heard. There is space for people to speak, and more importantly, there is space for people to listen.

Allow for silence. Participants need time for reflection and thinking. Silence does not necessarily mean discomfort. Make space for the movement of the Spirit.

Be careful with words and labels. All races are included in this conversation, so identification is important. There can be anxiety on what proper terms should be for different races (“Indian” vs. “Native American,” for example). The best way to deal with such anxiety is to address it directly. If there are people who identify with particular races present, courteously ask participants how they self-identify. As a facilitator, this can be done with respect and dignity. It is an ideal way to move through the initial discomfort of a conversation about race. If people choose not to answer, simply move on.

Keep track of who is contributing and who is not. You are not only helping to keep the group focused on the content of the discussion, but you are monitoring how well the participants are communicating with each other – who has spoken, who has not, and whose points have not yet received a fair hearing. A facilitator must constantly weigh the group’s needs against the requirements of individual members.

Follow and focus the conversation flow. A facilitator who listens carefully will select topics raised in the initial sharing. To help keep the group on the topic, it is helpful to occasionally restate the key question or insight under discussion. It is important to guide gently, yet persistently. You might ask, “How does your point relate to the topic?” or state, “That’s an interesting point, but let’s return to the central issue.” Keep careful track of time.

## remember ...

It is important to remember that your views on race and the views of others – especially younger participants – probably are not the same.

For Americans younger than 20 years old, the context of race and racism is very different. Younger people often do not have as many blatantly negative connotations about issues of race. The civil rights movement is part of our country's history, but not our recent history. What remains today are prejudices, and racial and economic disparities connected to race. These evils, although pervasive, do not have the same impact as an overt Jim Crow-based system.

In leading this conversation, your job is not to encourage participants to understand or adopt your values as the “correct” point of view. Your job is to understand the views of participants, while examining the ongoing oppressive systems occurring every day. You may be surprised at your own transformation while leading these activities.

## scripture suggestions

(Based on the Presiding Bishop's keynote address)

Revelation 7:9,13-17

John 17:21

Psalm 130:6

## prayer

It might be helpful to read the free, downloadable prayers and meditations in *Let Us March on Till Victory Is Won: Meditations Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington* (Forward Movement, 2012), which are available at <http://forwardmovement.org/Products/2205/let-us-march-on-till-victory-is-won.aspx>.

## getting started

Activity (30 minutes)

Materials Needed: large pieces of paper, markers, self-sticking notes

- Hang pieces of paper up. On each, write one of the following words:
  - Race
  - Racism
  - Prejudice

- Bigotry
- Discrimination
- Scapegoating
- Stereotyping
- Under each word, participants should write down their definitions. If a definition is repeated by a number of participants, that's fine; let them write it down anyway.
- At the bottom of each paper, write the definitions for each word found in Appendix 1 of this document, and then hide that definition under a self-adhesive note.

#### Discussion:

- What do each of these words mean?
- What thoughts come to mind with each word?
- Do the words sound harsh? Factual? What emotions are associated with each term?

#### Initial Questions:

- How is race made/determined/constructed?
- How has race changed, if at all?
- Is race irrelevant in today's society?
- Complete the following sentence: "Racism in America today is ..."
- What do young people understand about race that older people don't?
- What do older people understand about race that young people don't?
- How does racism occur in today's world?
- Is racism the same for men and women? If not, how is it different?

#### Optional Activity (30 minutes)

This is an activity that should be done with a group that has some history/experience with each other, as it can be emotional and can bring up sensitive feelings.

Materials Needed: large pieces of paper, markers

- Label each piece of paper with a particular race (Asian, Hispanic, etc.).
- Under each race, participants should write down what ideas, concepts, thoughts, And/or stereotypes are associated with that race. These can be positive or negative.

Discussion:

- What do the words mean for each race?
- Where do these ideas about particular races come from?
- What feelings are associated with each idea?

Optional Activity (30 minutes)

- Ask participants to close their eyes.
- When everyone is quiet with eyes closed, ask them to create a mental picture of the “all-American kid.”
- After a few moments say, “Freeze that picture.”
- Ask everyone to open their eyes.

Discussion:

- What did you see? (Many will have pictured a white boy.)
- Talk about what that mental image means to all kids who do not fit that image.

### **watch the first video (50 minutes)**

During her keynote address at the beginning of the video, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori says, “Race is a human construct” (1:52-13:00).

- What does she mean by this?
- Is being a human construct good or bad?
- What is (or was) the purpose of constructing race?
- Are we destined to separate ourselves by race?

In his remarks, the Hon. William F. Winter says that it is harder to deal with injustice now (31:50-34:00).

- Is this true?
- Is it necessary to understand the civil rights struggle of the past? Why?
- How conscious does one need to be about these struggles?
- What if someone simply enjoys the benefits of these struggles without knowing?
- Are people obligated to deal with racism?

The Rev. Michael Curry claims that racism is an “original sin” and goes onto compare racism to an addiction from which we are in recovery (36:00-38:00).

- Do you think this is an accurate way to describe racism? Why or why not?
- How would you describe the ongoing nature of racism to the average person?
- What is the importance of naming racism? What difference does it make?

Myrlie Evers-Williams says that racism is a “one-way event” (40:00-42:00).

- Is racism and discrimination unavoidable? Is it “in our DNA,” as Ms. Evers-Williams said?
- Is the U.S. founded on racism, “in the veins,” as Ms. Evers-Williams said?
- 50 years after the civil rights movement, is the U.S. still a racist country?
- Can this be changed? Can we change ourselves, make “another type of person”? How?

At the end of her remarks, Ms. Evers-Williams makes the plea for conversations to expand to gender and bi-racial Americans.

- Is discrimination by race and discrimination by gender the same thing?
- Have we made more progress in dealing with one than the other?
- In what ways is being bi-racial different than being of one race?
- If you are bi-racial, do you associate with one particular race over another? Do you feel forced to choose?

**watch the second video (35 minutes)**

Dr. Erma Vizenor talks about the “invisibility” of Native Americans (8:07-10:50).

- When you think of race, what do you mainly think of? Whites? Blacks? Hispanics? Do you think of indigenous people?
- Where do you draw your images of Native Americans? Is it from real interactions with indigenous people or through the media?
- Ask youth to stand if:
  - They are Native.
  - They know someone who is Native.
  - They have a classmate or teammate who is indigenous.

- They have ever visited a reservation.
- They have had a Native schoolteacher.
- They have seen Native people on TV.

Tim Wise challenges us to examine and unlearn what we have been taught about race (13:19-15:56).

- Where do people learn racial biases?
- As Mr. Wise asks, where does the teaching come from? (*Facilitators, this is a tricky one, because most people do not recognize their own biases, they only recognize it in others. So notice if people are talking in generalities, and encourage them to use “I” statements.*)

### for further conversation

As Ray Suarez says in the video, most people don’t think of themselves as racists, so the work is in breaking the system of racism.

- Have you witnessed acts of racism?
- Did you prevent it or name it while it was happening?
- Why don’t people stop acts of racism?

The Episcopal Church is working to correct some of the disparities caused by race.

- Why should the church be involved with race and racism?
- What is the church’s connection to racism?
- Does the church have more of a responsibility to address racism than other communities do?
- What steps should the church take to address racism?

Consider the future.

- In 50 years, what, if anything, will be the race issues of the day? What do you think the state of racism will be in 50 years?
- What is an appropriate goal or dream?
- What can you do to, as the Presiding Bishop says at the end of her keynote address, to “dream that world into being here on earth, and drive out hell to bring it to birth!”

## **in closing**

As a group, determine what the next steps will be, if any. Either develop a specific plan with timelines and responsibilities, or select a subgroup to begin working on a plan of action.

Use one of the suggested scripture readings or prayers to close this session.

## appendix 1: defining the terms

The following definitions are from *Seeing the Face of God in Each Other: The Anti-Racism Training Manual of the Episcopal Church* by the Rev. Jayne Oasin and the Diversity, Social, and Environmental Ministries team of The Episcopal Church (Episcopal Church Center, 2011), [http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/AntiRacism\\_Book-revise3.pdf](http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/AntiRacism_Book-revise3.pdf).

**RACE:** “Ethnic identity reflects historic culture of one’s family or group and their national or tribal identity. In most common usage in the USA, ‘race’ is understood as defined by skin color” (p. 229). Please note that race, as a concept, is not scientific and has been disavowed by the American Anthropological Society. For a more in-depth discussion of race, please see *Seeing the Face of God in Each Other*, p. 229.

“**RACISM** (and all of the other ‘isms’) is prejudice coupled with power. It exists to maintain the power and control of one group over another – to give one group the ability to say who is in and who is out, who is normal and who is abnormal, and who gets the resources and who does not. It is perpetuated by the refusal of the powerful to relinquish or share power and the inability of the powerless to obtain (or even think that they are entitled to) power for themselves. The racist system has intentionally kept us all unaware of the part we play in this system and our power to effect change. Only when we see the overarching role of the racist system can we begin to examine the consequences of racism on all of us and become allies for change, joining together to build a system which honors and values all, is inclusive of all, and models God’s reign of justice and peace” (p. 5).

“**PREJUDICE** is a pre-judgment on insufficient grounds; it can be positive or negative” (p. 107).

“**BIGOTRY** is a more intensive form of prejudice and carries the negative side of pre-judgment. The bigot is usually conscious of his/her feelings, nurtures them, and is often defined by them” (p. 101).

“**DISCRIMINATION** is the act or practice of according negative differential treatment to individuals or groups on the basis of group, class, or affiliation such as race, religion, and gender” (p. 101).

“**SCAPEGOATING** is the act or practice of assigning blame or failure to persons or groups instead of placing it directly on the person(s) to whom the blame or failure actually belongs” (p. 101).

“**STEREOTYPING** is attributing characteristics to a group simplistically and uncritically. Often, there is the assumption that those characteristics are rooted in significant biological differences” (p. 101).

## appendix 2: additional resources

The following resources are suggested reading and viewing in preparation for *Fifty Years Later: The State of Racism in America* webcast and workshops.

Presiding Bishop's address at *Fifty Years Later: The State of Racism in America*: <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/notice/presiding-bishop%E2%80%99s-address-groundbreaking-forum-fifty-years-later-state-racism-america>

### Articles and Websites

The Archives of the Episcopal Church. "The Church Awakens: African-Americans and the Struggle for Justice." [http://www.episcopalarchives.org/Afro-Anglican\\_history/exhibit](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/Afro-Anglican_history/exhibit)

DiversityInc. "Ask the White Guy." <http://www.diversityinc.com/topic/ask-the-white-guy>

Jacques, Martin. "The Global Hierarchy of Race." *The Guardian*. September 19, 2003. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/20/race.uk>

James, Navita Cummings. "When Miss America Was Always White." *Our Voices: Essays in Culture, Ethnicity, and Communication, Fifth Edition*. Eds. Alberto Gonzalez, et al. (Oxford University Press, 2011).

Lee, Lelanda. "If I Say, 'It's Racist,' Will You Still Be My Friend?" <http://library.episcopalchurch.org/article/if-i-say-its-racist-will-you-still-be-my-friend>

McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." *Peace and Freedom*, July/August 1989. University of Wisconsin, Madison. <http://www.library.wisc.edu/EDVRC/docs/public/pdfs/LIReadings/InvisibleKnapsack.pdf>

Oasin, Jayne Jones. *Seeing the Face of God in Each Other: The Anti-Racism Training Manual of the Episcopal Church* by the Rev. Jayne Oasin and the Diversity, Social, and Environmental Ministries Team of the Episcopal Church (Episcopal Church Center, 2011), [http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/AntiRacism\\_Book-revise3.pdf](http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/AntiRacism_Book-revise3.pdf).

PBS.org. "Freedom Riders." WGBH American Experience. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/freedomriders/>

PBS.org. "Race: The Power of an Illusion." California Newsreel. [http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_General/000\\_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)

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Rodman, Ed. "Unmasking the Face of Racism." The Witness. July 2003. <http://www.thewitness.org/generalconvention03/Racism.pdf>

Thompson, Robert. "Let Us March on till Victory Is Won." Forward Movement Press. July 3, 2012. <http://www.forwardmovement.org/Products/2205/let-us-march-on-till-victory-is-won.aspx>

## books

Agee, James. *Cotton Tenants: Three Families* (Melville House, 2013).

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New Press, 2012).

Barndt, Joseph. *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Fortress, 2007).

Barndt, Joseph. *Becoming an Anti-Racism Church: Journeying toward Wholeness* (Fortress, 2011)

Blackmon, Douglas A. *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (Anchor Books, 2008).

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism Without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

Branch, Taylor. *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (Simon & Schuster, 1989).

Broyard, Bliss. *One Drop: My Father's Hidden Life – A Story of Race and Family Secrets* (Back Bay Books, 2008).

Burrell, Tom. *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority* (SmileyBooks, 2010).

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (Routledge, 2004).

Cone, James H. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis Books, 2011).

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De La Tore, Miguel A. *Liberating Jonah: Forming and Ethics of Reconciliation* (Orbis Books, 2007)

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- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, 2008).
- Feagin, Joe R. *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (Routledge, 2006).
- Griffin, John Howard. *Black Like Me, 50th Anniversary Edition* (Signet, 2010).
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- Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice, Third Edition* (New Society Publishers, 2011).
- Lipsitz, George. *How Racism Takes Place* (Temple University Press, 2011).
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## films

- “12 Years a Slave” (2013)
- “42” (2013)
- “A Girl Like Me” (2005)
- “The Help” (2011)
- “In Whose Honor?” (1997)
- “Lee Daniels’ The Butler” (2013)
- “Matters of Race” (2003)
- “Rabbit-Proof Fence” (2002)

“Race: The Power of Illusion” (2003)

“Traces of the Trade” (2013)

“The Watsons Go to Birmingham” (2013)

## youtube

“Congressional Hearing: A Conversation on Race and Justice in America,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9v2tadJssE&feature=youtu.be>

“Colorblind” [La Jolla Playhouse response], <http://www.youtube.com/watch?vXd4X8r-2blde>

“What Kind of Asian Are You?” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWynJkN5HbQ>

“A Trip to the Grocery Store,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTvU7uUgjUI>

“Racism vs. White Guilt,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8eUkp0Ak4U>

“Shades of Youth, Youth Speak on Racism, Power & Privilege,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STgtyvAjs-Q>