

SACRED GROUND

Dialogue on Race and Faith

FACILITATING A SACRED GROUND CIRCLE

Note: Please be sure to read "Participating in a Sacred Ground Circle" as well, as it covers information relevant to both participants and facilitators that is not provided below.

Responsibility for Facilitation

This Sacred Ground curriculum is offered in the spirit of trusting congregations to take a “do-it-yourself” approach, while also acknowledging that this material isn’t easy.

Facilitation will be important, and we strongly recommend that it be done by people—whether lay or clergy—who have had some anti-racism training and experience leading groups. At the same time, we celebrate emerging leaders and new gifts—waiting until we feel fully ready can keep us from ever taking the first step. It can be especially meaningful to have former participants serve as facilitators for a subsequent group.

New facilitator training materials and a partial archive of past Sacred Ground webinars are available within the password-protected curriculum site. Additionally, please keep an eye on your email for information about the ongoing facilitation training and support opportunities offered by the Sacred Ground team of The Episcopal Church.

Ideally, two people will share this responsibility for facilitation, possibly pairing a more experienced facilitator with a newer one. If there are several circles happening simultaneously, we recommend regular debriefings or support meetings for facilitators.

For interracial circles (IRCs), a multiracial facilitation team is recommended. To provide additional support, there is a national affinity group for Sacred Ground facilitators of color. To join or for more information, email the Rev. Valerie Mayo at mayo.valeriej@gmail.com.

Materials

Participants and facilitators will need to purchase (or otherwise obtain access to) two books for this program. The first book is “Jesus and the Disinherited” by Howard Thurman. For the second book, there are two options: “[Waking up White](#)” by Debby Irving and “[White Awake](#)” by Daniel Hill. Both of these books chronicle the journey of a white person discovering all they had never known about race. They have both been selected to be accessible for white participants who are relatively new to the conversation about race, and also to push us all to think more deeply about whiteness. Please remember that they are both good options and they both have weaknesses; there is no right or wrong answer here!

As with choosing between these core texts, facilitators are empowered to customize the materials and prompts that they use. Use the Sacred Ground curriculum as a jumping off place. Emphasize materials that resonate and don't focus on materials that don't resonate. Furthermore, you are encouraged to bring in additional materials relevant to your place and the current moment. With the new prompts that ask participants to do research on what is happening locally, there is an even greater opportunity to customize your circle's experience. It isn't likely that any group will get to it all, so don't worry about that! Pick and choose each session and see how it goes for your circle.

Setting and Setup

If meeting online, test your meeting platform beforehand and make sure all participants are comfortable with the interface and functions you will be using, such as chat or raise hand, for example. This could happen in a practice session or a virtual meet-and-greet before Session 1.

If meeting in person, remember that comfort matters. Consider temperature, warm lighting, and comfortable chairs set up in a circle. You may want to offer food and drinks if meeting for longer than two hours or to encourage participants to linger before or after sessions.

This is a good time to think about accessibility of your circle experience, whether or not you are aware of accessibility needs in your group. Please take time to review the accessibility recommendations for Sacred Ground here: [Accessibility for Sacred Ground – The Episcopal Church](#).

Considerations for Interracial Circles (IRCs) and White-Work Circles (WWCs)

In IRCs, people of color should not be treated as the “experts in the room,” and participants may need to be reminded of this. Each person (of any race) should only be expected to speak of their own experience and only as they choose to do so.

Materials and conversations may land differently for participants of different races. It is important that facilitators pay attention to the “temperature” of the room, taking breaks as needed and slowing down to address any challenges that arise. Further, we recommend that facilitators of IRCs check in with all participants after a few sessions to invite feedback.

In WWCs, participants may openly lament the homogeneity of the circle. This is a common observation and a great opportunity to open up a conversation about the importance of White people doing this work together and the ways the curriculum draws on experiences of people of color without asking individual people of color to be responsible for educating White people on the topic of race.

Evaluation

In April 2022 we released an [evaluation report by Indígena Consulting, LLC](#), and we encourage you to create your own evaluation tools. You may draw inspiration from the surveys in the report’s appendices.

Recommended Session Format

The structure below assumes that participants will watch the films and complete the readings before each session, though some circles will choose to watch the films together.

Prayer to Begin Each Session

See the suggestions in each session, refer to the “[Religious Resources](#)” or find your own. Consider rotating the role of reading—or writing—an opening prayer.

Scripture Reading

See the suggestions in each session or the “[Religious Resources](#)” for suggested Scripture. Be flexible, as each dialogue circle will have its own spiritual trajectory and need different words at different times.

Group dialogue

Format: To encourage equal participation and ensure that louder voices don’t dominate, consider going around the circle, inviting each person to respond to a question or prompt. You may want to use a talking stick or stone to designate one speaker at a time. Some groups find timers helpful as well. Once everyone

wishing to share has done so, open up the conversation for discussion. This process can be repeated with additional questions or prompts.

Another process is to take turns inviting one another to speak. One such “mutual invitation” approach is described [here](#) by the Kaleidoscope Institute. You also may want to form smaller “breakout” groups or pairs for discussion at any point. We encourage thoughtful discernment as to what formats work best for your group.

General Dialogue Prompts:

Reflections on the History Covered:

- What “aha” moments arose for you during the film(s) and readings?
- What history did you encounter that was new to you?
- What spoke to your heart? How did it feel to take in this material? (Because many communities default toward “orderly engagement,” it is important to make space for strong emotions.)
- What new understandings do you have about the past?
- Did any of the history covered in the materials tie to your family or community history in some way? If so, how? Are there elements of your story you’d like to learn more about?

Reflections on Present-Day Legacies

- How did any of the present-day legacies covered in the materials connect to experiences you’ve had?
- Did you find yourself struggling with or wanting to push back against any of what you saw, heard, or read? If so, what caused that reaction?

Looking Forward

- What do you hope for? What do you fear?
- Given what you’ve seen, read, and heard, what are you inspired to do?

Housekeeping

Save time at the end of each session to discuss any logistical matters. This can also be a time to address any problems with group dynamics that participants may raise during the session. If issues arise that are more heated or charged, however, it is usually best to address those in the moment, rather than waiting until the end of the session.

Closing Prayer, Music, and/or Benediction

See the suggestions in each session, refer to the “[Religious Resources](#)” section, or find your own. Consider rotating the role of reading—or writing—a closing reflection.