

# SACRED GROUND

A FILM-BASED DIALOGUE SERIES ON RACE AND FAITH

## SESSION ONE STUDY GUIDE



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### SESSION I: STEPPING ONTO SACRED GROUND

#### To read beforehand

- Summary sheet: *Becoming Beloved Community: The Episcopal Church's Long-term Commitment to Racial Healing, Reconciliation and Justice*
- "Getting Started" sections of *Sacred Ground* webpages: "Invitation & Introduction" and "Organizing a Dialogue Circle," if not read already
- Column: "Black History Is Everyone's History" by Leonard Pitts, Jr.
- Excerpt from essay: "Not Somewhere Else, But Here" by the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker
- Excerpt from book: *Healing Our Broken Humanity: Practices for Revitalizing the Church and Renewing the World* by Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Graham Hill
- Selection from book: *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* by Jim Wallis (bottom of p. 103 to p. 109 from hardback edition)

#### Handout to print ahead of time for use during session

- "Key Distinctions for Understanding Race and Racism" by Katrina Browne and James Perry

#### Notes to facilitators

- This should be a longer session because it is important to build a sense of community with each other and because it is recommended that you watch the first film together, even if in the future you opt to watch films at home. Please consider a four-hour time allocation for Session I. If this is not viable, you can shorten the session by 90 minutes and ask participants to watch the film ahead of the session on their own.
- Below is a detailed proposed structure for this first session (rather than the "Session themes and overview from the author" provided for all other sessions) since there are so many important introductory bases to cover. Please use your judgment and tweak, as desired.
- The "Key Distinctions for Understanding Race and Racism" document is but one of many "definitions sheets" that are out there. We encourage you to use your discretion, and to substitute another one if you, your church, or your diocesan antiracism committee have a preferred set of key terms and definitions.
- Most of you probably don't have easy access to a labyrinth, but if you do, please consider adding some time for a walk as a prayerful opening of this journey, or asking group members to do so on their own time. In keeping with the metaphor of the labyrinth journey for this series, it would be appropriate just to *begin* the walk, not going all the way to the center and not going all the way out again. Each time they walk the labyrinth,

participants could go a bit farther in, culminating with arriving at the labyrinth's center by the end of the series. The final turning (*metanoia*) and walking back out again could be the next unknown chapter of your journey together. The last paragraph of the "Invitation and Introduction" provides framing for this, and you can also jump ahead and read Session 10 now if you wish to consider working with a labyrinth in this way.

- If you think that participants are not likely to do much reading before this first session (as they may wish to "check it out" before committing), then you can consider having some of the shorter readings as handouts (**pending permission on Pitts**) to read during the session rather than as pre-readings.

## Proposed session outline

### WELCOME (15 MIN.)

- Prayer and scripture reading.
- Brief introductions, such as full name, congregation (if multiple churches are represented), where grew up, how long lived here, and the name of one ancestor to bring into the space today for whatever reason.
- Program description: Reiterate that this is a multi-theme dialogue series. Race, racism, ethnicity, and whiteness are the primary focus, and you will also explore together how those intersect with family history/identity, socioeconomic class, political views, and regional identity (e.g., urban/rural, heartland and coastal, the 11 "nations" or regional cultures that we'll read about).

### THIS IS SACRED GROUND (40 MIN.)

- Have copies of the *Becoming Beloved Community* summary sheet, the Leonard Pitts column, and the excerpts from the Rev. Rebecca Parker and from Grace Ji-Sun Kim/ Graham Hill to hand out (**pending permission on Pitts**) in case folks didn't have a chance to read them beforehand, even if assigned.
- Review the *Becoming Beloved Community* framework. Invite comments and discuss together the value of treating this as a spiritual path, with the labyrinth as the metaphor, as well as the importance of drawing on our faith, being present to suffering, and believing in the promise and power of resurrection and new life – for us all.
- As circle organizer(s), share what spoke to you and inspired you to organize this circle.
- Take turns all sharing with each other: What drew you to sign up for this dialogue series? What are you yearning for? Feel free to reference any of the readings, the vision your convener put forward, or anything else. Consider using what hopefully will be your ongoing practice: a circle format, giving each person a turn to share or pass, but hopefully with everyone eventually sharing.

## CORE CONCEPTS (30 MIN.)

- **KEY DISTINCTIONS** (or comparable document)  
Hand out the “Key Distinctions for Understanding Race and Racism” document and review together. This is not meant, at this point, to lead to lengthy discussion of each form of racism and racialization, or to a debate of definitions. This touchstone reference document can be revisited over the course of the series for further discussion. In Session 1, it is intended to serve as an introductory survey of the terrain by establishing that racism is not simple but multifaceted, and by helping white participants begin to recognize inequitable dynamics they are a part of, even if they self-define as “not racist.” Invite a few comments/observations.
- **RACIALIZED EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS AS MESSENGERS**  
One of the key distinctions from the above handout is “racialized emotions.” This tends to get the least attention in dialogues on race and racism, though emotions are arguably a very powerful force in our interactions with each other. Here’s one possible exercise:
  - In the circle, have people call out, popcorn style (quickly and at random), any emotions they associate with issues of race and racism or with dialogue on race and racism.
  - Next, ask people to name the physical sensations they associate with the emotions they just said or heard (i.e., how do those different emotions actually *feel* in their body).
  - Then, ask people what they noticed. This is a good time to talk about 1) what the fight/flight/freeze response is and how it shuts down the brain, and 2) how white people have more power/freedom to avoid discomfort around these topics than people of color do.
  - If you had a chance to read Rev. William Kondrath’s article (recommended in the “Facilitator Preparation Guide”), perhaps reference his thoughts on the reality that many of us have been socialized to not express our full range of emotions, and to substitute one feeling for another. The invitation during this dialogue series is to give each other more and more permission to have the full range of emotions that arise, with the important caveat that, in an interracial dialogue circle, doing so becomes just that much more sensitive (readings in Session 2 delve into this).

## BREAK (15 MIN.)

## FILM: WATCH AMERICAN CREED (1.5 HOURS)

## DISCUSSION (20 MIN.)

Hold an open-ended sharing of reactions to the film and of hopes for the dialogue series and time together. Please put an emphasis on personal story-sharing, to continue the process of getting to know each other (versus an emphasis on debating opinions).

## HOUSEKEEPING (30 MIN.)

Discuss logistics:

- How frequently to meet – hopefully you’ve agreed ahead of time; if not, decide together now.
- How to watch films/videos – 1) alone so more time for dialogue in sessions; 2) together for the sake of immediacy/community, but may require longer sessions; 3) alternating alone and together; or 4) in pairs or small groups in people’s homes.
- Whether to share a meal at each session.
- Whether to have shared/alternating facilitation or a consistent facilitator or co-facilitators (if one or two people are willing), and related, whether to have a rotating “deeper dive” participant who does extra reading/viewing.
- What to do when participants miss a session – way of catching folks up, such as a buddy system.
- Make sure participants have read the “Participant Preparation Guide” and have the password for accessing the dialogue series materials.
- Name that discussion of group agreements or “norms” for respectful dialogue will happen next session (unless, as facilitator, you decide it’s important to do it in this session; see Session 2’s “Notes to facilitators” for more thoughts).

## CLOSING PRAYER

## TOTAL TIME: 4 HOURS

You may wish to follow the session with a meal together, or with a labyrinth walk, if available.