

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION PILGRIMAGE VIDEO SERIES

STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed to help viewers to deepen reflection on the series of short films tracing the Truth and Reconciliation Pilgrimage to Ghana in January 2017. The group of 22 pilgrims included the Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, his brother and sister bishops, leaders from Episcopal Relief & Development, and several staff members. Pilgrims prayed and reflected at several sites critical to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, including the Elmina and Cape Coast slave forts. They also visited Episcopal Relief & Development programs and deepened relationships with the resilient and resourceful people of Ghana.

The Akan symbol of Sankofa shows a bird facing forward while looking back. The symbol is associated with the proverb: "It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten." People in the African Diaspora often think of this concept as "remembering our past, to protect our future."

The three-video series – available at www.episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation-pilgrimage - welcomes viewers to join and reflect on the pilgrimage, as three participants experienced it:

1. *The Most Rev. Bishop Michael Curry*: Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church and a descendant of enslaved Africans
2. *The Right Rev. W. Andrew Waldo*: Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina and a descendant of slave holders
3. *The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers*: Presiding Bishop's Canon for Evangelism, Reconciliation, and Creation Care, and a descendant of enslaved Africans

Note: A fourth short film is forthcoming, and will feature highlights from the pilgrimage as a whole.

The videos and discussion guide are meant to open ways for many more people to walk however briefly in the pilgrims' footsteps. Viewers may then reflect on the legacy of slavery for each of us individually and for our families, communities, institutions and society.

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in the parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. (*Isaiah 58:6-12*)

This material is offered as part of the Episcopal Church's *Becoming Beloved Community* work for racial reconciliation, justice and healing. You may explore the *Becoming Beloved Community* vision document and resources here: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community>.

This video series and study guide also serves as precursor to an extensive race dialogue series that will be available to Episcopal communities in Fall 2018. That series includes a multi-session curriculum grounded in film/videos and readings. Participants may organize dialogue groups across racial, political and economic divides for a prayerful walk through the history of race and racism in the Americas.

Thanks once again to the team responsible for the Truth and Reconciliation Pilgrimage to Ghana, for the series of short films and for this discussion guide, including Katrina Browne, consultant for *Becoming Beloved Community*. If you have questions about engaging the ministry of racial healing, justice and reconciliation in the Episcopal Church, write to reconciliation@episcopalchurch.org.

VIDEO #1: MICHAEL CURRY

- A. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry speaks about the Pilgrimage as being a “homecoming” for him that gets at “the roots of who I am.” He quotes W.E.B. DuBois who described the black experience in the U.S. as “two warring souls in one dogged body” and how that resonates for him. Since childhood he’s been aware of being both “African and American, black and Episcopalian.” He adds: “All you have to do is go into your family history and you will see paradoxes galore – in all our families.”

Questions:

1. What do you know about your family’s histories in relation to slavery or other forms of racial oppression? Realize it may be stories of being harmed, of causing harm or both.
2. What paradoxes and complexities exist in your family tree or in your life in relation to issues of race?
3. If your family has passed down more silence and blank spaces than knowledge or stories, how or from whom might you learn more?

- B. The video refers to chapels above the slave dungeons; this was common. Over the centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, various religious authorities would take various positions on whether to baptize or not baptize captured Africans. It was deeply problematic either way. Presiding Bishop Curry explains that the Episcopal Church was a “Church that *did* participate and very often *blessed* some of the horror that happened here... We were in a chapel above the dungeon where people were being tortured, and [for 142 years of the slave trade] it was an Anglican chapel. Prayers from the 1662 prayer book were prayed while people were being damned below.”

Questions:

1. In what ways are you drawn to reckon, or what deep lessons do you pull, from the ways that Christians and Christian institutions justified enslavement?
2. What are the moral implications, in your heart and mind?
3. What does this teach you as you consider your current context?

- C. Curry lays a wreath at the *Door of No Return*, and calls it a “place of real recommitment” for him. “My hope is that this journey will help us to reclaim and reface a common history that we have – a painful past – not for the sake of guilt, but for the sake of *all* of us – black, white, red, yellow, brown – finding ways to face our past, and then to turn in a new direction and create a new future. This may be a moment when the churches may lead societies to find another way.”

Questions:

1. It is common for people to feel guilt, shame or blame when facing this history. Others feel free and renewed. Others feel conflicted. What do you feel, whatever your family history may be? What is to be gained from facing these stories?
2. Repentance means to turn around. What would such a shift or turn look like in your life?
3. What special role can Episcopal churches play in the process of repairing and healing the effects of past and present racial oppression? What could your particular ministry, congregation or diocese do to join in the work of repair and healing?

VIDEO #2: ANDREW WALDO

- A. In his reminiscences about growing up in Alabama during the Civil Rights movement, close to people who were in opposition to it, Waldo sums up the essence of Jim Crow as being the message: “Make way for white people.”

Questions:

1. How does that phrase capture what you have witnessed or experienced in your life, whether past or present? What examples come to mind?
 2. Due to deep conditioning that transcends culture, region or even race, most of us are prone to reflexive thoughts that reveal a kind of racial bias (often called “implicit” or “unconscious” bias). When have you discovered a bias like this in yourself? In what situations?
- B. Waldo is candid in sharing: “I felt pretty much silenced and numbed as we’ve gone through these castles and through the Pikworo Slave Camp. I don’t know that I have resources within me to respond adequately to that kind of suffering.” Feelings like this are common for people who, like Waldo, know themselves to be descendants of slave-holders, or who know themselves to be, more broadly, beneficiaries of the history of enslavement and the social construct of “whiteness.”

Questions:

1. How do you relate (or not relate) to what he describes?
 2. What might lie behind the numbness or the sense of inadequacy that Waldo describes?
 3. Have you ever felt similarly numb or inadequate in the face of suffering? How have you reckoned with those feelings? What, if anything, has helped you to shift or to move?
- C. Waldo shares: “I simply began to realize that if I was going to be faithful to God’s call to me as a reconciler, I couldn’t just let that history lie there. I had to be somebody who was going to be finding ways to heal, to repair, to reconnect. ... I have to shift course. I’ve got work to do! ... My inner sense of urgency to be about that conversation has just filled me in this place.” He goes on to say: “There’s a part of me that thinks we need to get past just talking about race, about justice. We need to live it. We need to bring our lives so *deeply* into that conversation that the objectification that slavery is the ultimate expression of is replaced by a complete I/thou relationship ... You have gifts that God has given you that I’ve been blind to. ... The readiness of the church for that conversation I think starts with a good look in the mirror. Am I ready to tell my story that’s painful, that’s hopeful? Am I ready to hear your story that’s painful, that’s hopeful? ... I’m ready to do that work.”

Questions:

1. Do you feel called to be a reconciler and a repairer of the breach? In what specific ways is God calling you to step forward to repair and reconcile?
2. What do you need to have or to do in order to answer this call?
3. What helps you to sustain a sense of dedication and determination?
4. What is your painful and hopeful story?

VIDEO #3: STEPHANIE SPELLERS

- A. At the slave forts, Canon Stephanie Spellers says she sensed the sheer trauma and evil of enslavement, as well as the strength her ancestors must have had in order to endure it. She admits that she has wondered: “With all the layers of misunderstanding and outright hatred ... Why are we here [in the U.S.]?” She shares about “growing up in a small town in Kentucky, sometimes wishing that I could be anything but black.” She also describes an amulet of her grandmother’s – whose mother had likely been enslaved – and how bringing it to the ocean waters by the slave fort became a chance to “wash off all of that” and become “more integrated ... me to myself.”

Questions:

1. What residue from the history of enslavement and racism are you aware of within yourself – whatever your background is in relation to this history?
 2. Have you ever wished you could be something different from what you are? What helped you to claim and affirm your identity?
 3. Do you have an ancestor, and perhaps an object connected to them, that gives you strength and grounding?
- B. Shifting from her own internal reconciliation and integration process, Spellers issues an invitation: “Please, go find whatever way you need so that you can be integrated, too. ... Whether it’s white folk who’ve been running from the stories of their ancestors and the reality of their own privilege, whether it’s black folk who have felt disconnected, rootless.” She goes on to refer to the process by which America asks people to leave behind who they were: “You were Irish before, now you’re American. You were Italian, now you’re American.’ ... That means almost all of us, to some degree, end up rootless, alienated from our own stories. ... I think we are more powerful healers when we have done that internal work.”

Questions:

1. In what ways do you feel rootless or rooted? In what ways are you perhaps alienated from your own stories, your root cultures, ethnicities and identities?
 2. How did your family history intersect with larger patterns in society and history?
 3. What do you see as the value of doing healing work in separate racial groups (as in affinity circles), and what is the value of doing healing together in interracial settings?
 4. What are your thoughts about Spellers’ theory that this internal work helps us “become more powerful healers”? What would that look like in your life?
- C. Spellers reminds us that reconciliation is at the heart of the Jesus movement, and that the process must begin in truth-telling.

Questions:

1. What teachings of Jesus feel most relevant to you as you meditate on these videos?
2. What do you feel Jesus asking you to do, about the past or the present or the future? What truth do you feel moved to speak, if any?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following are suggested for reading or viewing if you wish to go further:

Resources

Racial Reconciliation Resources compiled by the Episcopal Church:

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/resources-racial-reconciliation-and-justice>

Becoming Beloved Community framework and resources for racial healing, reconciliation and justice

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community>

Books, Articles, Videos

Homegoing: A Novel by Yaa Gyasi

Living Reconciliation by Phil Groves and Angharad Parry Jones

Inheriting the Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy as the Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty in U.S. History by Thomas Norman DeWolf

“On Slavery’s Doorstep,” a New York Times article on an African American family traveling to Ghana: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/01/travel/on-slaverys-doorstep-in-ghana.html?_r=1

“Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the 21st Century” by Maria Isasi-Diaz in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, edited by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel

“This Country Needs a Truth and Reconciliation Process on Violence Against African Americans—Right Now” by Fania Davis: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/this-country-needs-a-truth-and-reconciliation-process-on-violence-against-african-americans>

“The Time for Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Is Now” by Gail Christopher in *Liberal Education*, Fall 2016, <https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/2016/fall/christopher>

Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North, documentary film: www.tracesofthetrade.org

Organizations

Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing: <https://www.centerforracialhealing.org>

Coming to the Table: comingtothetable.org

National Council of Churches, A.C.T. to End Racism: <http://www.rally2endracism.org>