

R.A.C.E. TOWARD JESUS:

A JUNETEENTH
SMALL GROUP STUDY



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GCORR invites you to use this Juneteenth worship and study resource, adapted from our Lenten devotional resource [*“Transform Us: Journeying with Jesus Towards a New Church.”*](#) The devotional was inspired by themes from our Racial Justice Prayer and Action Challenge: lament, repentance, hope, liberation, healing, and reconciliation.

This worship and study resource focuses on the R.A.C.E. framework – a format for individual and communal reflection in wrap-up time on day 7 of the *Transform Us* Lenten devotional. Reflection prompts are different for both white and BIPOC participants to honor and embrace these differences. This 6-session worship and study resource can be used in personal and group study and reflection. The basic framework is below:

- **R**eflect on how my white privilege and participation in white supremacy has shaped the ways I look at Jesus and my faith,
- **A**ssess the ways in which I may need to repent,
- **C**hallenge the white normative ways I engage Jesus and my faith individually and in community with others, and
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way using non-dominant cultural lenses.

The purpose of this framework is so that both white

participants and BIPOC participants can examine how systemic oppression and systemic racism affects and harms the human family. Facilitators are invited to encourage participants to use this time as one of self-reflection. Participants may write reflections in a journal, write on a piece of paper, or sit quietly as they silently reflect on each prompt of the R.A.C.E. framework.

Our prayer is that as you engage this Juneteenth resource in this Pentecost season, the Spirit of God would meet you in a new, fresh way, transforming your head, mind and spirit. May Jesus meet you anew on your faith journey!

OPENING SONG:

Were You There? United Methodist Hymnal 288

OPENING PRAYER:

God of grace, the pain around us is indescribable. We seek justice every day! We feel defeated every day! The harder we try, the tighter the grip of white supremacy seems to get around our necks. We feel we are fighting alone. You are hiding your face from us, it seems, creator God! How long will we experience this defeat? How long will we suffer the pain? How long before we can breathe the fresh air of equity and justice? We are tired God! We have no more tears to cry. We have no energy. We feel numb. We wish to give up. Look at us, divine Wisdom! Have mercy on your people! Restore hope among us! Show us signs of your presence. Hear our humble cries! Help us Holy God, to not ignore our anger and our frustration, but to share it with you in a way that re-energizes us to continue the work: to seek justice, to demand equity for all, and to stand in the margins with the hurting. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

- *Rev. Alka Lyall, Pastor of Broadway UMC-Chicago, IL, GCORR Board Member*

OPENING EXERCISE/ACTIVITY:

RIVERS OF BABYLON (YOUTUBE)



- Listen to the following song from Sweet Honey in the Rock titled "Rivers of Babylon," while thinking about what experiences you may remember of having to sing a familiar song in a new place.
- Silently reflect for about 2 minutes. Then, take 5-7 minutes to share your insights with the person seated next to you.

SCRIPTURE:

PSALM 137

By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down, and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!"

O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us!

Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

REFLECTION/READING:

The writer of Psalm 137 reflects on the Babylonian exile of the Israelite people. The Israelites longed to return to Jerusalem – their homeland and place of worship. Their enemies and captors, the Edomites, took down the city and, now, ask them to sing songs of joy and play their instruments in a strange land. At the end of the psalm, the psalmist puts their feelings of vengeance into God's hands saying, "A blessing on the one who seizes your [the Edomites] children and smashes them against the rock!" Now, we may feel shock when we read this judging the Israelites for their words and point of view. However, before we pass judgment, let's consider two readings from our own history that reference Psalm 137:

FREDERICK DOUGLASS' FAMOUS SPEECH "WHAT TO A SLAVE IS THE 4TH OF JULY?"

Douglass uses the opening lines of Psalm 137 to paint the picture for his audience. He says that black slaves being expected to celebrate and sing about the independence of a nation in which they are still captives is wrong. Read an excerpt from his speech below:

This Fourth July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak today? If so, there is a parallel to your conduct. And let me warn you that it is dangerous to copy the example of a nation whose crimes, towering up to heaven, were thrown down by the breath of the Almighty, burying that nation in irrevocable ruin! I can today take up the plaintive lament of a peeled and woe-smitten people!

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea! We wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there, they that carried us away captive, required of us a song; and they who wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, o Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth."

A MIDRASH* READING OF PSALM 137

By the waterholes of Mother Country we slung down our yidakis, and cut our bodies and drugged our minds in grief, as we remembered the dreamtime.

And the settlers demanded from us a corroboree performance and a jail sentence, mutual obligation and a souvenir boomerang for the gift shop.

How could we dance and perform sacred traditions for their markets? We have become aliens and inmates, invisible in this eternal land.

If I forget the traditions of the elders, then will the brightly coloured birds fade to gray. Then will the rainbow-serpent permit the sun to dry up all the waterholes, and droughts and floods will come.

Baiaame will remember those white settlers — invaders, will bless those who pay you back for the small-pox and the hangman's noose.

And you, Daughters of the British Empire — ravagers, will be destroyed, for you stole our children, and you smashed their heritage against the jagged reefs.

- *Karl Hand*

January 31, 2011 | [Issue 866, Culture](#)

[Psalm 137 for Invasion Day.](#)

[A pro-indigenous midrash* | Green Left](#)

**a midrash is an interpretation or reworking of an ancient scripture text, which applies it to contemporary situations.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Has the practice of lamenting – either in personal worship or communal worship – been a part of your faith tradition and culture? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Why do you think Frederick Douglass refers to Psalm 137 in his speech “What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?” What is Douglass lamenting?
3. How does the second reading of Psalm 137 show the similar experiences of the Israelite people and indigenous people? What is being lamented in the indigenous version of Psalm 137?
4. Psalm 137 is a communal lament – the cries of a suffering and oppressed community of people. How might you begin incorporating the practice of lamentation into communal worship at your church/ministry setting? What might this practice look like?

WRAP-UP TIME: R.A.C.E. FRAMEWORK

(for white participants only)

- **R**eflect on how white culture has shaped the ways I engage lament as a regular spiritual practice.
- **A**ssess the ways in which I need to lament my wrongdoing individually and communally.
- **C**hallenge the white normative ways I engage lament as a spiritual practice.
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way using non-dominant cultural lenses in the practice of lament.

(for BIPOC participants only)

- **R**eflect on how white supremacy has shaped my relationship to lament as a spiritual practice.
- **A**ssess the ways in which I need to engage the practice of lament in my life for racial harm I have experienced.
- **C**laim/Reclaim the practice of lament individually, culturally and communally.
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way, in my understanding of lament, using my cultural lenses.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Say the following prayer together:

We pray for exiles and refugees;
for those who have been displaced by war,
poverty, discrimination, poison or violence;
for those who have fled their homelands
for safety, for work, for hope,
for those who have been taken from their homes
into slavery.
We pray with them and join in their song.

*By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
we hung up our harps.*

We pray for all oppressors,
that their eyes may be opened,
that their hearts be changed,
that they find their own true, deepest longings
for life.
We pray for them and plead for their conversion.

*For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*

We lament the families that are broken,
the cultures that are destroyed,
the traditions that are lost,
the voices that are silenced.
We weep with them and join in their song.

*How could we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my
highest joy.*

We join in their grief.
We honor their terror.
We accept their anger.
We lift their cry.
We stand with them and join in their song.

*Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall,
how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!"*

We pray for the end to all violence
and the end to all the offspring of injustice,
that evil itself be demolished
and its spawn eliminated,
that every human heart be free of fear.
We rage with all victims of injustice
and join in their song.

*O daughter Babylon, you devastator!
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!
Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!*

We pray for exiles and refugees.
We are among them:
for until our sisters and brother are restored,
our home is not whole or safe.
We pray with them, and join in their silence.

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Unfolding Light
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OPENING SONG:

I Surrender All, United Methodist Hymnal 354

OPENING PRAYER:

Forgiving God, thank you for saving us. Thank you for delivering us from sin and freeing us through the Cross. Sometimes we take your forgiveness for granted. Sometimes we take the forgiveness others have extended to us – whom we have harmed – for granted. Forgive us and help us remember that repentance is about more than saying I'm sorry. Help us remember that repentance Your way means repairing what we have broken. Help us remember that repentance Your way means we forever surrender to being "restorers of broken streets, repairers of broken walls" (Isaiah 58) – especially in the lives of those we have harmed. Amen.

OPENING EXERCISE/ACTIVITY:

Pre-work for group leader/facilitator:

Take a piece of 8.5x11" paper and fold it in half.

- On one side of the paper, write a series of "I'm sorry" statements (e.g. I'm sorry for breaking your vase, I'm sorry for saying that unkind remark to you, I'm sorry for driving your car and leaving it without gas, etc.).
- On the other side of the paper, write questions oriented towards repairing the harm that was done. For example, for "I'm sorry for breaking your vase," you could write "What can I do to fix it/replace it?" Write 10 "I'm sorry" statements and 10 questions aimed at repairing the harm.
- Cut them out and separate them putting all the I'm sorry statements together and all the questions together.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ACTIVITY:

Divide small group participants into 2 groups with an even number of people in each group. The small group should not exceed 10 people. Tell each group that once you distribute the pieces of paper, the 2 groups should not show their pieces of paper to the other group. Give the I'm sorry statements to one group. Then, give the questions to the other group. The group with the I'm sorry statements must match their statements with the group that has questions aimed towards repairing harm done.

Give small group participants 5 minutes for this activity. Once each statement finds its question match, then call the small group back together and reflect on the activity for 10 minutes using the below questions as a guide:

- Why do you think the I'm sorry statements were matched with questions aimed at repairing whatever harm was done?
- What did this activity teach you about repentance?
- What did you discover about yourself and/or the people you connected with in this activity?

SCRIPTURE:

ISAIAH 1:16-17

"Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." (NIV)

REFLECTION/READING:

Isaiah 1:16-17 gives us a vivid picture of true repentance – repentance that accounts for both the harm done and the repair God calls for through the prophet Isaiah. The first action “wash and make yourselves clean,” calls Judah and Jerusalem – the geographical people to whom Isaiah is speaking – to turn from the evil they are doing. The Hebrew word for “wash” here translates as “to wash off or away, to bathe.” At this point, our theological memories are likely causing us to think about the “bath” we receive as believers in the sacrament of baptism. Both symbolically and in the baptismal vows taken, we publicly commit to die to our allegiance to sin and evil pledging our allegiance to God alone. But the act of baptism does not stop there. If it does for us as believers, it is incomplete. God, through Isaiah’s words, calls Judah, Jerusalem and us, today, to repair the harm we have done to our neighbor and the vulnerable: **Stop** doing wrong. **Learn** to do right. **Seek** justice. **Defend** the oppressed. **Take** up the cause of the fatherless. **Plead** the case of the widow.

True repentance acknowledges the harm done in the past and in the present considering what the harmed neighbor and most vulnerable among us needs to become whole and healed. Then, true repentance vows to move forward transformed no longer engaging in the same patterns of harm.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How did you understand repentance prior to engaging this week’s Lenten theme? How do you understand repentance now?
2. How does engaging repentance God’s way dismantle our addiction to quick fixes and instant repair when we have harmed someone?
3. How does the American Church need to repent and reckon with its historical and present harm of the ‘other’ in the name of God? What might it look like for the American Church to repair the harm?
4. Why does God call us, as disciples of Jesus, to engage regular repentance in our daily lives?
5. What has God called you to repent of both individually and communally during this week of Lent?

WRAP-UP TIME: R.A.C.E. FRAMEWORK

(for white participants only)

- **R**eflect on how white culture has shaped the ways I engage repentance as a regular spiritual practice,
- **A**ssess the ways in which I need to repent of wrongdoing against my neighbor and turning more to God and others,
- **C**hallenge the white normative ways I engage the practice of repentance individually and communally, and
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way using non-dominant cultural lenses in the practice of repentance.

(for BIPOC participants only)

- **R**eflect on my privilege and participation in white supremacy and how it has shaped my relationship with repentance as a spiritual practice,
- **A**ssess the ways in which I need to engage repentance in my life towards those who have harmed me
- **C**laim/Reclaim the ways I engage the practice of repentance individually, in my culture and communally
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way, in my understanding of repentance, using my cultural lenses.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Merciful God, help us find our way again. Turn us back towards the road spotted with your other pilgrims, wayfarers, and repentant servants. Remind us that your Way is the way of returning. Guide us by your Spirit and by your Light. Make us remember the Power of the Spirit within us. Make us remember the gifts of our minds, our hearts, and our bodies that you have bestowed on us, that we would use them to honor the directives and the invitations you lay upon us. Place your wounded hands upon our broken hearts and turn us towards you. Lord of Light, Lord of Life, Lord of Resurrection. Amen.

- Rev. Sandra Maria Van Opstal,

*"A Liturgy of Longing," A Rhythm of Prayer:
A Collection of Meditations for Renewal*

OPENING SONG:

Song of Hope (Canto de Esperanza),
The Faith We Sing 2186

OPENING PRAYER:

"Dear Lord, You have shown me what a bridge Love is across my wild rivers of anger and my deep valleys of mistrust; how it can tame that uncompromising beast, *Guilt*, and its constant companion, Anxiety. You have shown me how Love warms without burning, cools without chilling, holds without crushing. Whenever I may be hungry, Love can fill my emptiness. Whenever I may be wounded, Love can heal. However, down I may feel, one touch of its pleasure can make me a saint. There are times, though, when Love expects for of me than I have to give. If it is possible, let that cup pass from me, but if not ... Amen. (from *For All Seasons. Prayers, Proclamations, Readings, Responses, Planned Spontaneity, Personal Meditation and Corporate Worship* by John Winn. Published in 2001 by The Preachers' Aid Society of New England, p. 42)

OPENING EXERCISE/ACTIVITY:

Invite class members to pair off. Taking turns, each person should tell their partner one social/political/moral issue or concerns that seems to them beyond God's control and beyond their own ability to address. The other partner is to listen without interruption, then offer a brief prayer for God's intervention, revelation, or idea for how the faith community might learn and do more. Allow about 10 minutes max for this activity.

SCRIPTURE:

GALATIANS 6:9-10, NRSV

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

REFLECTION/READING:

LEADER:

Ask a strong, expressive reader (or invite group members to take turns) to read this excerpt from, "Stir What You've Got," a sermon by the late Rev. Dr. Joseph E. Lowery, a contemporary of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and himself a civil rights era icon.

Stir What You've Got

When Paul told Timothy in his second letter was this: "Timothy, I know you are wrestling with some problems, but I want to remind you to stir up the gifts of God that I know are withing you." A lot of us are like Timothy: worried about what we don't have when we are not using what we do have. God has given us what we need. Just stir up what you've got.

...

Don't let that baptismal fire you got when you joined the church die out. Don't let the fire simmer down to a flickering flame, growing weak and dim from negative windows of doubt from within and from without. ...

Paul is suggesting that all of us have some gifts that we are only partially using. Ordinary people have some physical strength that they never use. Remember the old TV show *The Incredible Hulk*? The Hulk was an ordinary person until something stirred within him and ignited his extraordinary strength. It is the same thing with us. When you stir up what's inside of you, you gain new strength. ...

Stir up your intellectual energy. You just don't know how much brain power you have. I've read that we use only 24 to 33 percent of our brains. Let God stir up your intellectual energy and see what you might be able to accomplish. Some of us have physical energy, some of us have intellectual energy, and some of us are lazy spiritually. Our spiritual energy must undergird all that we are and

all that we do. Without a true relationship with God in Christ Jesus, we are in trouble. ... Spiritual energy needs to be stirred up. God gives us what is needed to build us, not destroy us; to enlarge, not to belittle; to inspire, not to be mean or demean.

Paul reminded Timothy of who he was and where he came from. Paul told Timothy that he knew his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. They had good stuff in them, so Timothy came from good stock. He just needs to rekindle and stir it up....

Stir up determination. Determine to try it God's way by trying love and forgiveness. ...Stir up grace. There is no secret what God can do when you stir up the gifts that are within you.

I was having tea with a friend, and I didn't remember putting sugar in the cup. It was still bitter when I took my first sip. Before I could add sugar, my friend reminded me that I had already added the sugar and that it probably was at the bottom of the up. When I checked, sure enough, there was the sugar. I just need to stir it up. When I did, I could taste the sweetness, and it was good to the last drop. That's the way God needs us to be. He needs us to stir up what he has already deposited in us. Look somewhere down in the bottom of your dedication. It's there! Whatever you have within you, stir it up!

—Excerpt from *Singing The Lord's Song in A Strange Land* by Joseph E. Lowery, published by Abingdon Press, 2011, pp. 37-40. Reprinted with permission.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Name a time when you spoke or acted on behalf of another person or group of persons whom you believed were treated unfairly in a public arena. What action did you take? (i.e., wrote a letter to a politician, attended a public meeting, attended a prayer vigil, etc.)
2. What makes some of us "grow weary of doing what is right" when it comes to addressing discrimination against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color? Against poor people? Against immigrants?
3. Think about the issue or concern you talked about in our opening exercise. What gift has God given you that you might "stir up" to address it? What one small thing are you willing to do?

WRAP-UP TIME: R.A.C.E. FRAMEWORK

(for white participants only)

- **R**eflect on how white culture has shaped the ways I understand hope.
- **A**ssess the ways in which I need to practice hope in my life and bring hope to others.
- **C**hallenge the white normative ways I engage Jesus and my faith individually and communally in the practice of hope.
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way using non-dominant cultural lenses in my understanding and practice of hope.

(for BIPOC participants only)

- **R**eflect on how white culture has shaped my relationship to hope.
- **A**ssess the ways in which my neighbors and I need to experience hope.
- **C**laim/Reclaim the ways I engage the practice of hope individually, culturally, and communally.
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way, in my understanding of hope, using my cultural lenses.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Stir us up, O God, and renew our spirits, that we may walk in your ways. Teach us how to ask for help, for love, for prayers from this community, so that we are strengthened and equipped to bear the burdens of those who are shunned, those who are alone, those who are blamed for their poverty or illness, or those whose stories are deemed unjustly as not worthy of being told. Stir up in us your divine love, your wide mercy, your deep justice, and your radical reconciliation, that all may know spiritual and physical enough-ness in your holy name, Jesus. AMEN.

OPENING SONG:

Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom, Sweet Honey in the Rock ([YouTube](#))

OPENING PRAYER:

"God, make us new. And help us to remember and renew our baptismal covenant, so we might become your beloved community, and the world may know that we are committed to dismantling all kinds of -isms and oppressions that tear the fabric of humanity. We commit ourselves to singing a new song, to sing the songs of Zion always and everywhere in our land. Amen."

*- Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar,
Bishop of The United Methodist Church*

OPENING EXERCISE/ACTIVITY:

HUMAN KNOT GAME

Facilitators:

Give participants about 10 minutes for this activity.

Participants stand in a circle and reach across to connect hands with another person. Once everyone has connected hands, participants must work to disentangle themselves without disconnecting hands. Participants may talk to one another to give direction and brainstorm together. Once the time has ended for this activity, participants may return to their seats and reflect on the activity using the following questions as a guide:

- How did you feel about this game before playing it?
- How did you feel about this game after playing it?
- How is this game similar and/or different to disentangling systems of sin and oppression?
- What did you discover once you untangled hands in one part of the circle?

SCRIPTURE:

ISAIAH 61:1-2

"The Spirit of the Lord God is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of our God's vengeance; to comfort all who mourn." (CSB)

REFLECTION/READING:

Lilla Watson, born in 1940, is an Indigenous Australian visual artist, activist, and academic. I became familiar with her name and her words when serving with Lutheran Volunteer Corps 8 years ago as their National Program Director. Watson is often credited with saying the following about liberation: *"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."* Watson has stated that she is uncomfortable with being credited as the sole author of these words because the quote was created in her collaborative work in the early 1970s with an Aboriginal Rights group in Queensland, Australia. Nevertheless, this quote resonates in my mind when reading Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus also spoke these words when he began his ministry after being in tested in the wilderness for 40 days. As we read Isaiah's words, reflect on Jesus speaking these words at the beginning of his ministry, and reflect on Watson's quote on liberation, we see that true liberation is not individualistic and cannot be realized by just one person. True liberation – Divine liberation – calls us to recognize our grace-filled responsibility as freed people of God and invite others into God's kingdom to engage collaborative liberation work for God's glory. Helping others is good; however, for sustaining systemic liberation, we engage the God-work of bringing good news, healing, proclaiming, and freeing those bound by sin from this mindset: **"I was once you. I am no longer by the grace of God. Let us work together with the Spirit of God to free one another and others."**

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you view the work of liberation – individual, communal, or both? Why do you view liberation this way?
2. Do you believe true liberation can be sustained in the lives of people and communities without the Spirit of God? Why or why not?
3. Reflect on Isaiah 61:1-2. Which actions in Isaiah's words are easiest for you to engage? Which ones are a challenge?
4. Reflect on the quotation by Lilla Watson. How does the Great Commandment mirror our liberation being "bound up" with our neighbor's liberation? Why is this important for us to understand in our discipleship journey and anti-racism work?

WRAP-UP TIME: R.A.C.E. FRAMEWORK

(for white participants only)

- **R**eflect on my white privilege and participation in white supremacy and how it has shaped the ways I understand liberation.
- **A**ssess the ways in which I need to practice liberation in my life and liberate others.
- **C**hallenge the white normative ways I engage Jesus and my faith individually and communally in the practice of liberation.
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way using non-dominant cultural lenses in my understanding and practice of liberation.

(for BIPOC participants only)

- **R**eflect on how white culture has shaped my relationship to liberation.
- **A**ssess the ways in which I need to liberate myself and others in my life.
- **C**laim/Reclaim the ways I engage the practice of liberation individually, culturally, and communally.
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way, in my understanding of liberation, using my cultural lenses.

CLOSING PRAYER:

"Lord, if we set the prisoners free, must we also leave judgement and sentencing to you? Will you set them on equal footing with us? Above us? Are you sure about this liberation thing, God? It sounds like a liberal agenda. You turn our worlds upside down and inside out. How can we unlearn the othering we've been taught our whole lives? We cannot even conceptualize the true liberation you promise. Help our unbelief. Your liberation is for the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed. May your will be done for your beloved children. Vanquish our hubris, fears, uncertainty, and doubts and lead us into your sweet liberation. Amen."

- *Nadia Kanhai,*

*NIC Chair, Anti-Racism Task Force, co-chair CCORR
Aurora, IL*

OPENING SONG:

Heal Us, Emmanuel, Mark Miller & the New Haven Collective ([YouTube](#))

OPENING PRAYER:

"God of the wilderness, be with us as we wander through the desert of our lives. Keep us from running back to the safety of our old assumptions and walk with us as we learn to live the life abundant. Amen."

- *Donna Sinclair, ED. Copyright 1998 United Church Publishing House*

OPENING EXERCISE/ACTIVITY:

Ask each participant to pair off and to ask and answer, in turn, the following questions:

1. Imagine you are invited to dinner at someone's house, in a neighborhood that is strange to you, with people you do not know. What three things would you want the host to do to make you feel welcome, safe, and comfortable? Explain why you chose those three things.
2. Imagine that a person from a racial group other than your own, speaking only a bit of your language, dressed in rags, and obviously fleeing in fear, approaches you for food, safety, and support. What are the first three things that you will do to help them?

SCRIPTURE:

PSALM 23

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. God makes me lie down in green pastures, God leads me beside quiet waters, God restores my soul. God guides me in paths of righteousness for God's name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in God's house forever. (NIV)

REFLECTION/READING:

(Volunteer reads)

According to the New Interpreter's Bible, the well-loved Psalm 23 is not merely a hymn of comfort to be recited to mark occasions of death and dying. Rather, it is "a psalm about living, for it puts daily activities, such as eating and drinking, and seeking security, in a radically God-centered perspective. Further, the commentator writes, this psalm "calls us not simply to claim individual assurance but also to take our place with others in the household of faith." Psalm 23 praises God as like a shepherd who provides for and protect a flock. In King David's time, it was the sovereign human ruler—the one anointed king—whose solemn responsibility was to provide sustenance and safety for his people. However, the biblical accounts preceding the psalms demonstrated that human kings were many times self-absorbed, cruel, inept, and unreliable. So, the psalm writer reminds God's people that whatever they have comes from God. The imagery of God as a shepherd is also a reminder to the Hebrew people that God delivered them from exile in Egypt and continues to deliver them and guide them in right paths. The act of anointing with oil, an ancient practice that accompanied the coronation of kings and queens, is in this psalm is offered by God to the one who believes in God and

trusts and follows God's teaching. In this psalm, the interpreter's volume asserts, God is celebrated as both shepherd and host, who "provides food ('You prepare a table'), drink (my cup overflows'), and shelter/protection." In extolling God's goodness and love, the psalmist uses the Hebrew word, *hesed*, which denotes more than kindness and superficial love. Rather, *hesed* (sometimes spelled "chesed") means compassion, loving-kindness, faithfulness and grace of God. It implies the aspect of God's love that call us today to be kind host, to recognize that the necessities of our lives belong to God and that they are gifts to be shared. Psalm 23 is not merely a celebration of what God has done for me and aren't I blessed—although I am. It is also a call to proclaim to the world a God who want to prepare tables and anoint all people as holy, beloved, and worthy. It is a call for followers of Jesus Christ to extend our hospitality, our loving-kindness, and our hands to one another, especially those pushed aside and despised because of greed, poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other ways that we "other" God's children. So, God is your shepherd? How might you better witness to others God's transforming presence in your life?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is one action our church/faith community could undertake to offer greater hospitality to members of a marginalized group in your community? (Discuss several and choose one.)
2. If our church/faith community took this action, how would you participate?
3. What ONE word or phrase from Psalm 23 might inspire a group from your church/faith community to take this first action step?

WRAP-UP TIME: R.A.C.E. FRAMEWORK

(for white participants only)

- **R**eflect on how white culture has shaped the ways I understand healing.
- **A**ssess the ways I need healing in my life and how I need to extend healing to others.
- **C**hallenge the white normative ways I engage Jesus and my faith individually and communally in the practice of healing.
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way using non-dominant cultural lenses in my understanding and practice of healing.

(for BIPOC participants only)

- **R**eflect on how white culture has shaped my relationship to healing.
- **A**ssess the areas of my life in which I need healing.
- **C**laim/Reclaim the ways I engage the practice of healing individually, culturally, and communally.
- **E**ncounter Jesus in a new way, in my understanding of healing, using my cultural lenses.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Now, O healing Savior, may the assurance you have given to generations of your anointed ones, the power of your Lenten wilderness struggle, and the promise of the coming Resurrection Day reside in each of us now and forever, and may that power bear fruit in the here and now. We claim and proclaim your blessings. AMEN.

OPENING SONG:

I Choose Love, Mark Miller ([YouTube](#))

OPENING PRAYER:

"Help each of us, gracious God, to live in such magnanimity and restraint that the Head of the church may never have cause to say to any one of us, "This is my body, broken by you." Amen.

- *Chinese prayer*,

United Methodist Hymnal, 564

OPENING EXERCISE/ACTIVITY:

The following exercise is adapted from the book Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0 by Brenda Salter McNeil, pg. 42-44:

- Give everyone a puzzle piece as they enter the gathering space.
- Begin the activity with opening prayer and reading 1 Corinthians 5:16-21

PART 1

Have everyone look at their puzzle piece examining it closely. You may ask the participants the below questions to help their examination:

1. What does your puzzle piece look like?
2. What specific details do you notice about it?
3. How do you feel about putting puzzles together? Why do you feel this way?

PART 2

After everyone has examined their puzzle piece, invite them to work together to assemble the puzzle. Observe group dynamics as the Sunday School leader/facilitator.

1. What do you notice among the group?
2. Who seems to be engaged in putting the puzzle together? Who seems withdrawn/disinterested/frustrated?
3. Which group members seem to be the leaders in this activity?

PART 3

After 20 minutes, invite everyone to go back to their seats for a large-group debrief. Use the below questions as guides for the discussion:

1. What did you discover as you were assembling the puzzle as a group?
2. How did your feelings/thoughts change from the beginning of the activity until the end?
3. How is the process of reconciliation like putting a puzzle together? How is it different?

You may end the opening activity with these words from Dr. McNeil:
"Reconciliation is about how to relate even after forgiveness and justice have occurred. It's about how to delve even deeper into relationship with one another. Reconciliation is possible only if we approach it primarily as a spiritual process that requires a posture of hope in the reconciling work of Christ and a commitment from the church to both be and proclaim this type of reconciled community" (p. 26).

SCRIPTURE:

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21

"So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who have us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by no counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!" God caused the one who didn't know sin to be sin for our sake so that through him we could become the righteousness of God." (Common English Bible)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why must human beings be reconciled to God before being able to reconcile with themselves and others?
2. How are forgiveness and reconciliation connected? What character traits do you think are necessary to maintain reconciliation – especially between oppressors and the oppressed (or those who have been victimized and victimizers)?
3. Can one experience reconciliation with God, others and themselves without forgiveness? Why or why not?
4. How does the scripture lesson help us change the lens through which we engage racial reconciliation? What “human standards” might we use in our churches and communities that prevent others from being reconciled to God and us?
5. How might we be messengers of Christ's reconciliation in the public square (i.e. home, work, play, community, etc.)? What prevents us individually and communally from being ambassadors for Jesus in this way?

WRAP-UP TIME: R.A.C.E. FRAMEWORK

(for white participants only)

- **R**eflect on my white privilege and participation in white supremacy and how it has shaped the ways I engage reconciliation as a regular spiritual practice,
- **A**ssess the ways in which I need to reconcile with God and others rather than white supremacy,
- **C**hallenge the white normative ways I engage Jesus and my faith individually and in community with others, and
- **E**xperience/Encounter Jesus in a new way using non-dominant cultural lenses

(for BIPOC participants only)

- **R**eflect on my privilege and participation in white supremacy and how it has shaped my relationship with reconciliation as a spiritual practice,
- **A**ssess the ways in which I need to reconcile with God and others by telling them how white supremacy has harmed me,
- **C**laim/Reclaim the ways I engage Jesus and my faith individually, in my culture and community
- **E**xperience/Encounter Jesus in a new way using my cultural lenses

CLOSING PRAYER:

Creative and Life-giving God, open our eyes to see all the ways the fresh wind of Your Spirit is making all things new. Help us resist the temptation to discern your reconciling movement and others by our own human standards. Help us to bold reconcilers for You remembering that the Gospel message and mission is about reconciling communities, peoples, and systems to You, not us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.



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