

WHITE SAVIOR

RACISM IN THE AMERICAN CHURCH

Church Small Group Discussion Guide

For the Leader

Welcome to the conversation related to *White Savior: Racism in the American Church*. This discussion guide is geared toward mainline Protestant, mostly white congregations who are new to exploring the topic of race in a church setting. It is important to expect and normalize strong discomfort in white participants without rushing to reassure, while also creating an environment where people of color (POC) feel safe. Please frequently read the room and check in with participants to adjust your approach accordingly. Consider establishing a verbal covenant among the group to accept each other's beliefs, feelings, and experiences without judgment, and also to agree that what's shared in the room stays in the room.

Welcome Activity

Supplies: Nametags, pens, Racial Identity Questionnaire

Welcome people as they arrive, and invite them to make a nametag and include preferred pronouns. Distribute the Racial Identity Questionnaire. Allow participants a few minutes to complete the questions, letting them know that they can choose whether or not to share their answers when they've finished. Once the participants have completed the handout, invite them to share their answers aloud.

Watch the Film

Gather your group around a screen and watch *White Savior: Racism in the American Church* in its entirety. This film is 62 minutes long.

Discussion

Gather into groups of four or five people for conversation, choosing from these Discussion Starters.

Understanding Privilege

- ↳ What might it mean for the most privileged people in our society to understand that race is a fairly new idea in the scope of human history? What might it mean for the least privileged people in society?
- ↳ The video indicated the idea that the concept of race is deeply tied to our desire to own property. What advantages does home ownership provide in society? What advantages come from owning multiple pieces of real estate, like a vacation home or rental property?

- ↳ Take a look at the homeownership graph on the back of your handout. What are the demographics in your neighborhood? How many people in your neighborhood do you estimate own their dwelling? What impact do you think these patterns of homeownership have on your neighborhood?
- ↳ For much of United States history, the story of slavery has been presented as one in which chattel slavery is part of our identity from the very beginning. However, this is not the case. Prior to watching the video, did you know about the 1676 Virginia uprising that spurred the shift to chattel slavery? If not, how do you feel today, knowing about this intentional system of “divide and conquer”? Do you believe a similar system still exists in the United States today?

Building Empathy

- ↳ Share a story of a time when you noticed in a powerful way that someone’s race made them different than you. How did this person’s race shape their life experiences in such a way that theirs would be significantly different than yours?
- ↳ Take a few minutes to talk through the events of your day yesterday. How many times was race something you actively thought about, whether your own race or someone else’s?
- ↳ We humans are hard-wired at birth to consider people who look and sound most like us to be the most safe, good, and trustworthy. However, several studies examining people’s perceptions of these qualities (safety, goodness, trustworthiness) have shown that, regardless of race, most people perceive white people as more likely to be good, trustworthy, attractive, and kind and POC as less likely to embody these attributes. How does this affect how we perceive characters in scripture? When you picture Moses, Joseph, Ruth, Isaiah, Mary, Jesus, Paul, what do they look like? What does God look like?

Moving Forward

- ↳ For the POC in the group, what is one thing you most need from this congregation or denomination in order to feel safe and welcomed? If there are no people of color in the group, share one thing a person of color has told you about what they need to feel safe and welcomed in church or in the world?
- ↳ For the white people in the group, what is one thing about life in this congregation or denomination that makes you feel very comfortable, but might make POC feel unsafe or unwelcome? What can you do this week to change it?
- ↳ The POC participants in the video expressed concern about the church’s rush to reconciliation in issues of race. Is there a time in your life when a rush to reconciliation has stood in the way of justice? How about in the life of your congregation?

Guided Reflection

Supplies: Guided Reflection handouts, stopwatch, chime

If you would like to provide time and space for participants to do some internal reflection, print and distribute the Guided Reflection pages. There are different meditations for white and POC participants. Let participants know they can read each step silently and then begin the reflections. Move participants through the steps by gently stating “Begin Part 1” or “Move to Part 2” every two minutes. If you wish, ring a soft chime when there are 30 seconds remaining in each section. To end this time, take three deep breaths together.

Closing Prayer

Share this Prayer for the Diversity of Races and Cultures, from *The Book of Common Prayer*:

O God, who created all peoples in your image, we thank you for the wonderful diversity of races and cultures in this world. Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship, and show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all your children; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.