



Reclaiming & Living COVENANT

A LENTEN EXPERIENCE OF SCRIPTURE, UMC SOCIAL PRINCIPLES
& ANTIRACIST ACTION TO BUILD BELOVED COMMUNITY

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Baltimore-Washington Conference
The United Methodist Church

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[VIEW STUDY ONLINE](#)

Welcome

We are grateful that you have chosen to explore this opportunity to deepen and grow your faith during this holy season of preparation. We begin each week's lesson with Scripture followed by exploring United Methodist Social Principles, learning from the witness of United Methodist ministries around the world, and reflecting on how God is calling each of us to faithful action in the face of evil forces that seek to divide and demean the human family. While this evil has many names, we name racism as one of these manifestations. This study is full of invitations to draw on each of the above resources as you navigate God's calling to address the brokenness forged by racism.

God's covenant with us; our covenants with each other

Throughout Scripture, covenants play a powerful role in how we understand relationships. Covenants establish norms and boundaries; they help us understand how we should act, what we can expect from others, and how to prioritize values. Covenants tell us who we are. Covenants are *lived*. The Scripture in the lectionary for the season of Lent repeatedly returns to the theme of covenant. We are asked to remember how we are called into covenant with God over and over again, with one another (John 13:34-35), and even with all of God's creation (Genesis 9:9). These covenants create a web of relationships, and we come to see that how we treat each other and the earth directly relates to how we worship and pray (Isaiah 58:1-12; Matthew 6:1-6).

This web of relationships, and how God uses covenant to bring us hope and promise in the midst of our wilderness wandering (Exodus, Numbers 21:4-9), are also themes that will run through this study. May we continue to look towards the reminder that we mark during Holy Week: that we are bound in covenant with God and with each other through the ministry, life, and death of Jesus. May God's invitation to renew that covenant and reinforce our commitment to our shared life together refresh our commitment to bold discipleship this season.

On the practices and purpose of Lent

While each day presents us with the opportunity to repent, to turn, to re-turn, and reorient ourselves towards God's covenant vision for our participation in a holy and just society,

Lent is a particularly appropriate liturgical season for this sacred and timely work. During Lent, we search our souls, confess our sin, and prepare our hearts for the events of Holy Week. We do this holy work personally and in a covenanted community. We consider the ministry of Jesus, who is God's revelation to us and our path to liberation from unconscious and deliberate participation in personal and social sin. We walk the path of liberation with Jesus toward the events that will unfold in Jerusalem at the cross.

Lent is a time to renew our commitment to the practices of our faith that help us to receive God's grace -- what John Wesley called the "means of grace." You can find a longer list of these practices [here](#), but this study will be focusing on reading and studying Scripture, exploring ways we are equipped to seek justice, learning about the experiences of other United Methodists engaged in the work of ending oppression, and creating

accountability to and with each other. One of the ways that United Methodists express our commitment to creating a world that conforms with the witness of Scripture and God's expression of justice is through the Social Principles.

While these topics are always part of our life as Christians and are expressed differently in responses to different needs in society, in recent years, more and more light has been shed on the legacies of racist policies and racist ideas in the United States and in nations around the world. As members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference and the world-wide United Methodist Church, we continue to reckon with this living legacy and our institutional complicity in maintaining it. Bishop LaTrelle Easterling has shared some powerful [calls to action](#) in support of justice for all people. We hope this study will draw us into both acts of sincere repentance and tangible reparation as we prepare our hearts to rejoice on Easter Sunday as "[Earth and heaven ring with the harmonies of liberty.](#)"

The United Methodist Social Principles

If you've never heard of the Social Principles before, you are not alone. While not considered church law, the Social Principles are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice (cf. ¶ 509 UM Book of Discipline.)

You'll discuss the history and tradition of the Social Principles in Session 1 of this study. However, it's important to know that the Social Principles referenced here have been entirely revised over the past eight years. They will be reviewed and acted on by the postponed 2020 General Conference of the United Methodist Church, which is scheduled to meet in August 2021. We encourage you to use the proposed [2021 Social Principles](#), but if you'd like to see the ones currently "in effect," you can find them in the 2016 Book of Discipline, available online [here](#). We have included the Preface and Preamble on [page 47 of this document](#) to frame our United Methodist understanding of justice as a part of our discipleship. See the overview video [here](#).

BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS

In addition to the Social Principles, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church also reviews, debates, and acts on many other resolutions. These resolutions are collected into the Book of Resolutions, and reflect more detailed expressions of theological positions and descriptions of contextualized responses to our social, economic, natural, and political world. While they are the official positions of the Church, they are also not church law, but provide a starting place and offer guidance for how United Methodists can reflect on and navigate complex issues. It is okay to disagree with them and with each other, but we do ask that you commit to consider these discussions prayerfully and thoughtfully.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Each week, we invite you to engage “core preparation” materials. These include:

- Scripture from Lenten lectionary texts (with devotion/journaling exercise)
- Excerpts from the Social Principles
- Selected Resolutions
- Additional videos, news articles, and web-based resources

We’ve also compiled additional preparation materials for those who want to learn more or who would like to use this study as a daily devotional. You will find these resources in [Appendix B: Going Deeper](#). You will also find a Group Covenant in [Appendix A](#) and we invite you to begin the first session by reviewing this suggested Covenant and considering if by consensus this can help hold your conversation.

Note that the suggested videos and articles are meant to be starting points and to fuel discussion; their inclusion does not represent a blanket endorsement of everything the author or speaker claims and teaches. On several of the videos, you will have to fast forward to a specific “mark,” or minute, in the video. To do that, simply click on the solid white line at the bottom of the video, and drag it to the correct time.

Sessions will include suggested prayers, reflection, additional Scripture study, group exercises, video selections from the “Living our Principles” video series based on the Social Principles, and invitations to action.

Each week, we encourage you to think broadly about what kinds of actions are most appropriate for your community. Is there a ministry that relates to that week’s discussion? Great! Explore how you can teach other congregations about how and why that ministry is effective and worth building on. Are there ministries of compassion and mercy that meet essential needs in your community? Wonderful! Can you apply an antiracist lens to that work, or build on it to include public policy changes and acts of advocacy?

We expect that some of the terms and concepts may be new to you, and if that’s the case, we are glad you’re willing to spend time with these ideas in the context of your faith. Take time to learn about the work already being done in your community, town, or county, and discover opportunities for partnership. Sometimes God calls us to invent new things, and sometimes God calls us to support and lift up work others are already doing. We pray for your ongoing discernment as you continue to invest in doing this work.

We hope you will grow increasingly comfortable asking some of the following questions:

- How does racism directly and indirectly affect you and those who are close to you?
- Where do the Social Principles reflect sound biblical and theological teaching on what we experience as racism?
- In what way do the Social Principles and United Methodist resolutions guide and call you to a deeper commitment working against racism in yourself and in your community?
- What is racial bias, how does racial privilege work, and what is systemic and structural racism?
- How can you engage in bold and faithful acts of antiracism, even if you are still absorbing or questioning some of what you’re discovering here?

We hope you come away from this study celebrating how the Scriptures and Social Principles articulate the covenant of God’s people with everyone in the human family and with our shared planet. We pray also that you come away, full of a renewed imagination for how you and your church community can take action together to loosen the bonds of racism so that all may flourish.

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Session 1:

Incorporating Justice as a Spiritual Discipline

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17. As this study is six weeks, plan your start date accordingly.

Core Preparation:

- Read the Welcome and Introduction paying particular attention to the [2021 United Methodist Social Principles: Preface and Preamble](#)
- [Resolution 3371: A charter for Racial Justice in an Interdependent Global Community](#)
- [Council of Bishops Juneteenth Announcement \(video; 10 min\)](#)
- Scripture passage and exercise (below): [Isaiah 58:1-12](#)

Take at least 10 minutes to sit with the passage from Isaiah 58 to reflect and jot down notes. Read it at least twice - preferably once aloud. Listen to these words that have formed worshiping communities in the Jewish and Christian tradition for more than 2,500 years.

Lent is sometimes a season in which we fast from indulgences as a way to remember our call to sacrifice for the Gospel. It's sometimes a season when we adopt healthy habits in the name of self-improvement that's conveniently timed during Lent. But Christians often have vastly different experiences surrounding the practice of fasting. Have you ever practiced fasting? Why or why not? How has fasting strengthened your faith?

For the Israelites, to whom God's words come through the prophet Isaiah, fasting was an integral part of their worship. And yet, at least some people in the community were clearly missing the point. In fact, God is uninterested in their worship as long as their lives are not conforming to the standards God has set for the community. On a piece of paper, list all of the verb phrases in vv. 6-9a, beginning with "loose the bonds of injustice."

Consider the ways in which your faith practices reflect God's calling to this kind of worship.

Jot down notes or circle areas on your list that you have questions about. What ministries at your church engage the work of justice (and "undo the thongs of the yoke of oppression"), and the work of compassion (and "share bread with the hungry" or similar)? What growing areas do you see within existing ministries or for brand new ministries to better harness the energies and resources of your community to ensure that your worship and devotional life are aligned with the type of worship that God desires? As we prepare to specifically consider the

ways that this Scripture and others speak to racial injustice, where do you see this text echoed in your memory, experiences, or community? If you have yet to set a Lenten practice, consider choosing a practice that relates to something on your list of Isaiah 58 actions that are faithful to the “worship that God chooses.”

Introduction

We begin with Scripture.

God’s concern for the just behavior of God’s people is preserved throughout our Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation. You have read Isaiah 58:1-12 as part of the preparation for this discussion, which is but one of many expressions of God’s vision for how those who worship God should structure their lives and priorities. In this session, we will also hear teaching from Jesus (in Matthew 6), and throughout this study, we will read Scripture that is both at the heart of the Lenten journey and full of calls to reorient our lives towards God’s justice in community. We will specifically be reflecting on justice in light of race, and learning how to best employ an antiracist lens to the ministry work we do in our communities that seeks to confront and address the legacies of the particular injustice of racism.

In light of God’s foundational and consistent call to justice found in Scripture, it is the tradition of The United Methodist Church to speak out, to organize within and across congregations and the full connection of United Methodism. As members of a church with congregations around the world, our call is to be both local and global in our awareness and in our work. This means learning from each other across our wide network and strengthening the bonds of community between us. In our time together, we will explore stories and glean wisdom and inspiration for the kind of ministry that is possible in our communities, from stories and faith leaders in the U.S. and around the world.

This week, we begin by encountering the United Methodist history around the Social Principles as an expression of the covenant that we believe God creates for and with us as we seek to live together in the beloved community. We also begin our exploration of race in the Social Principles and Resolutions, and in our own stories and community. We have provided a lot of material in the Introduction and the Appendix sections of this study that may also be useful for you as you prepare to consider the multifaceted dimensions of racism and how our Scripture and tradition inform our responses to it. As always, these are starting places.

Opening prayer

(from Martin Luther King Jr.’s sermon “A time to break silence” from April 4, 1967)

Ever present God, you called us to be in relationship with one another and promised to dwell wherever two or three are gathered. In our community, we are many different people; we come from many different places; have many different cultures. Open our hearts that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion and the treasures of diversity among us. We pray in faith. Amen.

Group Discussion

(Optional activities are in the sidebar to enable a customized experience.)

Foundations of the Social Principles: The UMC Social Creed

[Social Creed video](#) (3 min)

The original Social Creed from 1908 focused on the needs and rights of workers and has been updated many times since first written. Read [the current Social Creed from the 2016 Book of Discipline](#), preferably using a different voice from the group for each section.

Have you read the Social Creed before? Have you used it in worship? What, if anything, surprises you about the text of the creed and the brief history you learned in the video? What images of God come across to you in the Social Creed? What do you wish was included that is not in there now?

Watch together: Excerpts from Living our Principles videos

In the following two video segments, you'll see different reflections on the Social Principles, which grow out of the legacy of pursuing social holiness that predates the Social Creed. After you watch both videos, share your thoughts with the group.

Rev. Paul Njugana is a United Methodist district superintendent in The United Methodist Church in Kenya. In this video segment, he shares his perspective on the value of the Social Principles in his community. Watch Njugana's [video segment](#) (4 min) from "Living our Principles" Episode 1.

Rev. Emanuel Cleaver is an ordained United Methodist Elder also serving in the United States House of Representatives. Watch Cleaver's [video segment](#) about the role of the Social Principles in public life (7 min) from "Living our Principles" Episode 5.

1. What are your responses to these pastors and how they use the Social Principles in their work and lives?
2. Rev. Cleaver references Matthew 6 in his video. Together, read [Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21](#), which is also one of the lectionary readings for this week. Here, Jesus reflects on themes you will recognize from [Isaiah 58:1-12](#), cautioning against people prioritizing the performance of worship over the substance of worship.
3. While Jesus suggests that "we should give to the needy in secret"

Optional activity 1: Race Card Exercise

As we bring our focus more closely on the ways that racial justice is incorporated into the Social Principles, let's acknowledge that race can be challenging to discuss, whether you are in a group you know well or surrounded by new people. In 2013, NPR launched [The Race Card](#) project, which invited people to write six-word "essays" about their experience of race. As a way to begin to express some of the complicated feelings that can accompany discussions of race, take a few minutes for each group member to write their own six-word essay about race. If you're not sure what to write, try consolidating a powerful memory, or a feeling, or a question you have into six words. We encourage group members to share their essays as an expression of trust and a willingness to be vulnerable and offer their reflections honestly with your group.

What did you learn about yourself when reflecting during this exercise?

so that we do not claim recognition for our generosity, when is it important to be public about how we invest our resources of time, attention, and money? When can “giving in secret” actually undermine the work we are doing or the cause we’re supporting?

4. What does it mean to “store up treasures in heaven?” Does investing our hearts and resources in the well-being of others on earth reflect this idea of storing up treasures in heaven? Why is investing our hearts and resources in “loosing the bonds of injustice” an important part of our faith? How are we investing our hearts and resources in using the influence we have to bring our communities more closely into alignment with the ethic of God’s Kingdom?

See [Appendix B](#)
for recommended
additional resources
on this topic.

Optional activity 2: Imagination exercise

Imagine a country inhabited by two groups of people. Imagine your group runs the banks, the schools, the government, the military, the hospitals, the religion and the media. Your group has the power to make your public opinions the dominant ones while creating policies and practices that marginalize, scapegoat or silence the other group. List the feelings and thoughts that may develop by being part of the dominant group in power. Then list the feelings and thoughts that might develop by being a part of the group not in power.

Reflect

In your preparation for this week, you reflected on Isaiah 58:1-12, read the Preface and Preamble of the 2021 United Methodist Social Principles and Resolution #3371 “A Charter for Racial Justice in an Interdependent Global Community” from the 2016 Book of Resolutions. With these in mind, discuss:

1. The Preamble to the 2021 Social Principles affirms that “differences are a precious gift and a daunting challenge.” In what ways have you experienced the diversity of people within the church as a gift and a challenge? In your study groups and worship, does your church tend to rely on books, small group studies, music, and liturgies written from the perspective of one racial, ethnic, or gender identity? How can you work together with your church leadership to ensure that your community continually stretches itself to experience the gifts offered to the church by persons across all types of diversity? (See [Appendix C](#) for a list of multicultural worship resources)
2. What barriers to doing antiracist work do you see within your church, community, and/or the United Methodist denomination?
3. Looking at the list of actions you compiled when reading Isaiah 58:1-12 and the eight action steps in the resolution together, how do they inform each other? Can you apply an antiracist lens to your brainstorming? Discuss ideas within the group.

Take Action

(Choose which action you will take this week.)

1. Commit to noticing images this week that reflect the ideas in the Isaiah 58:1-12 passage. Look for images in nature, your home, your neighborhood, and in media that reflect the loosening of the yoke that the Scripture talks about. Notice when you see images where things, people, and places are still tied up, hamstrung, and restrained from the life of liberation that God encourages us to seek.
2. If antiracism language is new for you, commit this week to exploring the resources in this study to become familiar with some of the terms and references that we will be exploring in the remainder of the study

Closing Prayer

A Prayer for Racial Justice

When our eyes do not see the gravity of racial injustice,
Shake us from our slumber and open our eyes, O Lord.

When out of fear we are frozen into inaction,
Give us a spirit of bravery, O Lord.

When we try our best but say the wrong things,
Give us a spirit of humility, O Lord.

When the chaos of this dies down,
Give us a lasting spirit of solidarity, O Lord.

When it becomes easier to point fingers outward,
Help us to examine our own hearts, O Lord.

God of truth, in your wisdom, Enlighten Us.

God of love, in your mercy, Forgive Us.

God of hope in your kindness, Heal Us.

Creator of All People, in your generosity, Guide Us.

Racism breaks your heart,

Break our hearts for what breaks yours, O Lord.

Amen.

Accessed from the [Social Justice Resource Center](#).

Session 2:

Caring About All of Creation

First Sunday in Lent: February 21

Core Preparation:

- [UM Social Principles](#) - Creation - Read introduction, A. Environmental Racism, and C. Food Justice, starting at page 105. (Once you open the link, you will see the entire Book of Discipline. Click on the square icon at the bottom, which will then allow you to scroll to the correct page.)
- UM Resolution #1025 on [Environmental Racism](#)
- [News article](#): How Maryland's Preference for Burning Trash Galvanized Environmental Activists in Baltimore
- Scripture and journaling activity: [Genesis 9:8-17](#)

Set aside at least 10 minutes to reflect and jot down notes on this Scripture. Read it at least twice, preferably once aloud. The first time you read it, we invite you to read the text to become aware of the story. The second time you read it, read it a little slower. Let God guide you to the words or phrases that God would like to draw your attention to.

Covenants are powerful ways to structure relationships, and covenants are found throughout all of Scripture. They are based on promises and mutuality and include signs and actions that participants take to show they are living according to the covenant. When God covenants with Abraham, Abraham and his descendants began practicing circumcision. When God covenanted with the Hebrew people through the 10 commandments, they are told to practice Sabbath as a sign of their adherence to the covenant. Later, Jesus gave his disciples the gift of Communion as a sign of and call to remember the new covenant that God creates through him.

In this Scripture passage, God creates a covenant with Noah and his family, *and* with the animals, *and* with the land, *and* with all future generations to come. God memorializes this covenant of peace and the promise to never again destroy goodness of creation with a rainbow. The rainbow is a symbol of the promise God made to us, but it should *also* be a symbol of our parallel responsibilities to each other. Just as we are partners in caring for creation in the creation accounts earlier in Genesis, we are partners in advocating for the spirit of God's covenant with Noah to "never again destroy the earth." We dare not undermine the intention of God's promise to Noah, the earth, and future generations with actions that destroy and exploit that which God created. There are consequences to our actions and to our inactions. This story invites us to consider our interconnectedness across communities and indeed across the world.

Modern economics and technology make the world smaller and smaller, such that seemingly casual consumer choices, in one corner of the world, can have disastrous environmental, economic, and human rights impacts on other corners of the world. As global businesses pursue profits over people, we turn natural resources into

commodities to fuel expected lifestyles without considering the long-term consequences of these choices. We participate in the destruction of creation in so many ways, often without knowing it. Economic and political forces extract natural resources from local communities, commercial forces push low-income populations to live in "less desirable" neighborhoods that are subject to pollution or to farmland that are difficult to farm. Often, these impacts are felt first and most significantly by Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, and by communities already living in economic insecurity.

The Bantu affirmation of *Ubuntu* states, "I am because you are." How does this concept of shared responsibility for each other and the earth influence how you interpret the story of God's covenant with Noah? What other symbols might be helpful for you to remind yourself of ways to live into this covenant on a daily basis? Is it a post-it note on your bathroom mirror? A sticker on your debit card? A child's drawing of a rainbow taped to your front door?

As we reflect this week about how we can live into our responsibilities to each other in the context of caring for creation and environmental racism, consider the legacy of God's covenant with all of creation, and how you can most faithfully participate in it.

Introduction

Growing out of your reflections on the covenant that God created with Noah and with all of creation, we focus this week on environmental racism. We will explore some ways that United Methodist communities have organized to strengthen the health of the natural world in their towns and cities, thereby also increasing the health, economic well-being, sustainability, and access to justice in their communities. There are more stories about this work than we can tell in the short time we have on this topic. But we hope you will continue these conversations in your churches, communities, and families, and pledge to take actions -- both large and small -- to reflect the characteristics of the world that better reflect our covenants to care for each other and for creation.

Opening prayer

A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH FROM POPE FRANCIS ENCYCLICAL

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,

help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives,

that we may protect the world and not prey on it,

that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts

of those who look only for gain

at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,

to be filled with awe and contemplation,

to recognize that we are profoundly united

with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle

for justice, love, and peace.

Accessed from [Interfaith Power and Light](#).

Group Discussion

(An optional activity is the sidebar to enable a customized experience.)

Reflect

1. Consider your community, the communities where you have lived over the course of your life, or places you have visited. What did you notice about where the following infrastructure elements were located:
 - Landfills
 - Grocery stores
 - Factories
 - Power plants
 - Highways and ports

Was there a pattern to what neighborhoods had easiest access to good grocery stores and green spaces? Who lives near landfills and polluting factories? Has anyone ever visited a [superfund site](#)? Share briefly about your experiences.

2. Share reflections from the four preparation readings, focusing on what the participants learned and took away from the excerpts and exercises.

Watch together: Excerpts from Living Our Principles videos

These two stories, featured in a [video on the UM Social Principles](#), highlight some of the ways United Methodist communities are advocating for and engaging in environmental justice work.

Optional activity: Covenant, Bias, and Prevenient Grace

To help us continue to knit together our experience of racism and our responsibility as Christians, we invite you to watch this excellent interactive TED talk from Prof. Jerry Kang about Implicit Bias. In the questions that follow, we'll help you connect the video to your preparation on environmental racism from earlier this week. [Access the video](#), "Makers, Artmakers, Peacemakers: Immaculate perception?" (13 min).

As Professor Kang demonstrated with science -- and also humor -- implicit bias is something that precedes our awareness. It is only by challenging our own assumptions and perceptions that we can grow towards a better understanding of the attitudes and stereotypes that are lodged underneath our consciousness, and how they impact our feelings and behaviors.

What were the biggest takeaways from this TED talk for you? What did you learn that you are most likely to tell your friends and family?

As Christians, we believe that there is a covenantal relationship with God that *also* precedes our awareness. As United Methodists, we refer to these movements of God that happen before we are even aware of them as *prevenient*

In the [first clip](#), Rev. Kennedy Mwita, a pastor and farmer, talks about the impact of tobacco farming on his community and on efforts to shift to farming chilis to restore the land and improve the quality of life of the farmers (play for 7 min).

In the [second clip](#), we learn about grassroots activists and mining in the Philippines (play for 7 min).

Share reflections from the group in response to the videos.

Reflect

We know that speaking up can sometimes be dangerous, as is illustrated in the tragic story of Pepe's death as a result of his organizing for justice against the mining companies and the government in the Philippines. Our own Scriptures are full of stories like this, stories when prophets proclaim a message that challenges those currently in power. The consequences can be dire.

1. [Mark 1:9-15](#) was one of the lectionary readings for this week. As is typical for Mark, he covers a lot of ground quickly. In the span of six verses, we see Mark's take on John baptizing Jesus, the temptation of Jesus, John's arrest, and the beginning of Jesus' ministry. John's prophetic ministry ultimately cost him his life. And the reality is that all prophetic ministry puts us at risk for consequences. The journey of Lent calls us into these calculations. What consequences are we prepared to accept for the Gospel that draws us into this work of proclamation alongside John?
2. Are we willing to accept changes in our lifestyles and to shop differently? Are we willing to invest our time and attention differently? Are we willing to build relationships outside of our neighborhoods and our comfort zones? Are we willing to stand alongside those leading these efforts and risk backlash from friends, family, or corporations?
3. How can the church support these efforts? Together, brainstorm questions or concerns you have about environmental racism in your community. Consider all forms of environmental racism you've learned in this session, and others you are familiar with from other areas of your life, work, and experience. Be sure to reflect on how food justice, pollution, energy production, and removal and treatment

grace. Sometimes, in hindsight, we are able to see that God is moving in mysterious ways that we did not have knowledge of, or even have language to describe at the time. To do so also requires reflection and introspection, and can help us move into closer alignment with the Spirit in the present

God's covenant with all of creation precedes our conscious decision to say yes to participating in it. This relationship with creation precedes our choice to follow Jesus as disciples on this Lenten journey of reflection and repentance. Wonder and care for God's creation prepares us to hear and live out the Gospel in creative ways.

Similarly, relationships with people of different racial identities & histories prepares us to challenge our own biases. Practicing how to discern these callings and these biases takes intentionality as they are currents moving under the surface.

How do you most naturally do this kind of reflection? Prayer? Accountability groups? Journaling? Meditative walks? If this kind of discernment is new to you, focus on and explore social experiences you've had in which race has been a factor. Also, take time to reflect on powerful memories or experiences surrounding God's presence in your life.

are handled locally. What programs are already in place in your community addressing these issues? Do these programs employ a racially aware approach? What about ministries in your church? Does your church support any initiatives advocating for policy change on issues such as these? Do you have a creation care team? Have you considered applying for grants to create gleaned gardens? How could you support the good work already happening in your community? What are other churches around you up to?

Take Action

1. Each group member may choose one of the questions or topics your discussion generated to investigate further in the coming week so that you can report back briefly next week or via e-mail to other group members.
2. Write a letter to your local representative expressing your concern about, or support for, one policy or program you have learned about this week.
3. Have at least one conversation, in-person or through social media, about environmental racism this week.

Closing Prayer

("New Zealand Prayer" from "A New Zealand Book of Prayer")

Eternal Spirit, Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name shall echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed
by the peoples of the earth!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever.
Amen.

Accessed from [Faith Climate Action Week](#).

See Appendix B
for recommended
additional resources
on this topic.

Session 3:

Embracing the Gifts of God-Imparted Equity and Diversity

Second Sunday in Lent: February 28

Core Preparation:

- Read selected proposed 2021 [Social Principles](#): The Social Community (page 21):
 - Section B. Bullying and Other Forms of Violence (page 24);
 - Section C. Colonialism, Neocolonialism and their Consequences (page 24);
 - Section L. Racism, Ethnocentrism and Tribalism (page 29).
- Read Resolution 3376 (2016 Book of Resolutions): "[White Privilege in the United States](#)"
- Take the [Harvard Implicit Bias test](#). This is an excellent quiz that helps us uncover the choices we make that are not always obvious. It also looks at the impact our biased decisions, intentional or not, may have on others.
- Read and reflect on [Psalm 22:23-31](#) using the questions below.

Reflecting on the Psalm

1. When have you felt an immense sense of awe that you were in God's presence?
2. When have growing feelings of affliction caused you to turn to God in spontaneous prayer?
3. Is there a memory you have of congregational worship where you felt a confident assurance that God will meet the needs of those who are afflicted and that God will keep the covenant promises God has made?

Introduction

In Session 1, we encountered the United Methodist Social Creed and the proposed 2021 Social Principles, both of which ground our Wesleyan faith in public action.

In Session 2, we explored how communities organize to strengthen the covenant with creation through sustainable, earth-friendly practices that are implicitly and explicitly antiracist.

In Session 3, we now turn our attention to the covenant that connects our human family across race and ethnicity. This covenant begins with our common parents in the faith, Sarah and Abraham, and continues on through the prophetic, public ministry of Jesus in community with his first disciples. We invite you to become familiar with the interconnectedness of three harmful practices detailed in the Social Community section of the Social Principles: bullying, racism, and colonialism.

These practices reflect human choices to misuse privilege and power, and are codified into the systems and structures that guide our daily lives. Some of us are all too familiar with the devastating and historic harm they cause to people, communities, and nations. We fervently pray for the spiritual and moral character needed to build up our capacity for human empathy and solidarity that will dismantle these practices.

Opening prayer

Excerpted from the hymn "All Are Welcome" by Marty Haugen

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
And words are strong and true,
Where all God's children dare to seek
To dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness
And a symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

All are welcome, all are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.
Amen.

Group Discussion

(Optional activities are in the sidebar to enable a customized experience.)

GROUP SCRIPTURE STUDY

Read and discuss [Mark 8:31-38](#)

1. This passage takes place immediately following Jesus' ministry of healing, feeding, and teaching. Jesus turns his attention to naming the unpleasant and undeniable truth about his own death. Notice that Jesus chooses to raise questions about his death in a public space. Jesus does not hide the consequences of his choices; he knows that challenging the dominant expectations of those in power is dangerous and yet he does not whisper about it in secret. Do you know someone who has been a truth-teller, one who is willing to name the elephant in the room? How were they treated? Were they met with denial and avoidance? Or with full-hearted belief?
2. Jesus graphically details that his execution will be public. Imagine how the disciples may have responded: perhaps in shock or denial, fear, or even embarrassment or shame? In instances when you have been told a challenging new truth, how did you respond?
3. For us as listeners, Jesus' words are intended to be stark and to name the consequences of a prophetic ministry, of calling out practices that do not live up to the covenant God has made with our ancestors.

Optional Scripture Study

Read and Discuss

[Genesis 17:1-7; 15-16](#)

1. Abraham and Sarah became the foreparents and ancestors of a nation claimed by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. This is our family of origin and the covenant that was made before we were born. The covenant described here is marked by radical trust in a sovereign and good God. As a group, review these texts by New Testament writers to review how they interpreted God's covenant with Abraham as inclusive of all people irrespective of their tribal or ethnic identity:
 - [Galatians 3:29](#)
 - [Matthew 1:1-17](#)
 - [Luke 3:23-38](#)
2. Even more, this covenant expands outward from one family to all our families, so the story of our faith is actually a world-family story. It's no coincidence that this story reflects what we know from science. Today, we are genetically far more connected than we may imagine in spite of the systems that would seek to divide us. In fact, modern scientists have proven that there is no specific gene that

Jesus goes on to name those groups who will conspire to accuse, detain, and execute him and we wonder: who will benefit from his death? What will happen to the Gospel? His message demonstrates that to follow him, we need to be prepared to make real sacrifices. We let go of harmful practices that do not serve humanity, and that keep us from being fully human. How can this process dramatically alter our lives?

Reflect

Discuss these questions as a group, recognizing that not everyone in the group needs to answer every question:

1. What defines your “public” life? Do you make a clear distinction between your personal faith and public life? In his 2005 book, [The Call to Conversion](#), Jim Wallis states that “faith is always personal but never private.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
2. What makes up your character and identity? Is it what you do? Or, is it what you have done in the past? Is it who you know and how you relate to others? It takes a lifetime to collect an identity, but we don't start at zero. We're born into a culture and a social location that are self-perpetuating. For most of us, this determines significant parts of our identity as we age. As you reflect on the way these “default settings” of your culture are manifested in your life, what would you decide to give up, release, or let go of?
3. What prevents us from letting go of the harmful parts of our default culture? Might this impact your access to control, security, assurance of success, or relationships? How does our response to Jesus' good news create challenges for others?
4. The default-settings of our culture and families often impact how we experience and talk about race. How often do you talk with your family and friends about race? Daily? Once a week? Once a month? A couple of times a year? Never? Why?

Reflect and journal on the readings

In preparation for this week, you reviewed the following [social principles](#) from “The Social Community” section of the Social Principles: B. Bullying and Other Forms of Violence; C. Colonialism, Neocolonialism and their Consequences; L. Racism, Ethnocentrism and Tribalism.

1. In light of the Scripture we have just studied together, what do you think these three proposed Social Principles have in common?

can be used to determine a person's race. Have you heard justifications of racism grounded in innate DNA differences before? In history classes? In the present? If the science that actually undermines the genetic reality of race is of interest to you, find a relevant article in the [Going Deeper appendix](#).

3. What can we learn from God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah that gives us insight into God's call in our lives and our ethical response in our community? If we are all “stars in the constellations” of Abraham's family and therefore siblings across our differences, how do we reconcile the harm we do to each other with this calling to be family? Do we see that central to this call on our lives is a mandate to confront xenophobia where we see it, and to embrace multiracial and multiethnic communities of worship, compassion, justice, mission and advocacy?

Continued on next page...

2. Each Social Principle addresses an example of harm done to the human person that diminishes a person's human dignity or denies their human rights. They name specific practices that seek to erase our sacred worth as persons created in God's image and likeness. They recognize that political and social systems are set up to legitimize oppressive or dominating behaviors. In what ways do these systems harm the image of God in each of us? How are these practices collectively justified by our "default culture" which teach us biases and imbed in us ideas of racial or ethnic superiority and privilege?

Resolution 3376. "[White Privilege in the United States](#)" lists several privileges afforded to White people and White communities that have an adverse impact on Black, Brown and Indigenous communities. The list may feel overwhelming and includes:

- job discrimination;
 - segregated housing;
 - an increased likelihood to be victimized by hate crimes and unchecked over policing, police aggression, biased courts, higher rates of incarceration, and sentencing disparities based on race;
 - gaps in access to health care and educational disparities;
 - a limited ability to secure bank loans and credit and a history of wealth accumulation.
1. How has White privilege functioned in your own life? Physically, and spiritually? Go beyond the above list, based on your own experiences.
 2. As we read earlier in Mark 8:31-38, Jesus declares "that or those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life." How do we hear this declaration in light of your reflection on white privilege?

Watch Together

The UMC in Zimbabwe lifts up several inspirational examples of how people are making a choice to use their strength to thrive and as a result increase the capacity, resiliency, and infrastructure in their communities in the midst of death-dealing circumstances. In this [video excerpt](#), you'll meet Beauty Maenzanise, a Dean at Africa University, as well as other faculty and students at the school. (Stop at 29:30). (10 min)

Maenzanise talks about the changes she has seen when women's voices have been centered in leadership. "Centering the right voices" is something you may hear about in conversations about race and

Optional Activity 1:

Go through the "[White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)" (15 min) exercise developed by Peggy McIntosh that helps us all see the cumulative impact that racialized privilege has on our personal and common lives.

Optional Activity 2:

Form an "Empathy Circle." To do this, invite participants to take on the role of a person directly impacted by one form of harm named in the Social Principles and the personalities we read about in [Mark 8:31-38](#). Ask that person to speak from their perspective using "I" statements.

Some examples are: Peter the disciple; the Pharisees; the crowd; a person who has been bullied; a colonizer; a person who has experienced systemic racism; or a person who denies that systemic racism exists.

Go one round, taking turns speaking for 30 seconds to one minute each from that person's perspective. Once everyone has spoken and if you have time, exchange identities and try speaking from another person's perspective. When you close the "Empathy Circle" ask and answer, "What did I learn about myself?" (10 min)

Continued on next page...

inequality. How can you and your church “center the right voices” as you respond to racism?

Take Action

(Choose which action you will take this week.)

- This week, read and share [this resource](#) for mission and ministry with your congregation in your weekly Sunday Worship bulletin.
- Read “[103 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice](#)” and pick three actions that you covenant to practice.
- Watch [5 Tips for Allies](#) (4 min) and commit to reflecting and deepening your engagement on one of the 5 tips expressed here.

Closing Prayer

(Based on [Genesis 17:1-7; 15-16](#) and *United Methodist Hymnal*, p.34
The United Methodist Publishing House, Nashville, TN 1989)

God says, “I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you”.

[Leader] On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you: Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?

[All] We do.

[Leader] Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

[All] We do.

[Leader] Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?

[All] We do.

[Leader] According to the grace given to you, will you remain faithful members of Christ’s holy Church and serve as Christ’s representatives in the world?

[All] We will in the name of the One who was and is and is to come,
Amen.

Optional Activity 3:

Think about a time when you grossly misrepresented or misunderstood a person of any race. What information was missing that allowed you to draw incorrect conclusions? What in your belief system contributed to your misrepresentation? (10 min)

Optional Activity 4:

[Doctrine of Discovery:](#)
[Dismantling Racism Panel Discussion | The United Methodist Church \(umc.org\)](#) (8 minutes) In this brief discussion, faith leaders talk about the legal creation of the “Doctrine of Discovery” and the legacy of its impact on the colonization of indigenous peoples in the United States. You are invited to also read [this letter](#) on behalf of the Native American International Caucus of the UMC on the need to be vigilant to secure sovereignty in solidarity with indigenous peoples.

See [Appendix B](#)
for recommended
additional resources
on this topic.

Session 4:

Working for Economic Justice

Third Sunday in Lent: March 7

Core Preparation:

- Read the 2021 proposed [Social Principles](#): The Economic Community
 - Economic Challenges:
 - Section B. Poverty and Income Inequality (page 15)
 - Section C. Human Trafficking and Slavery (page 16)
 - Economic Justice:
 - Section C. The Dignity of Work (page 18)
- Read [2016 Resolution 3378. Racism and Economic Injustice Against People of Color in the US](#).
- Read and set aside 10-15 minutes to reflect on [Exodus 20:1-17](#) and [John 2:13-22](#) using the meditations below. Please read the Scripture passages twice. The first time you read it, read the text to become aware of the story. The second time you read it, read a little slower. Let God guide you to the words or phrases to which God would like to draw your attention. Take some time to journal your responses to the readings.

[Exodus 20:1-17](#)

God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah is based on trust in a future they could not see and a world they could not even imagine. Recall the sequence of events: Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt; Jacob's family lived through a famine and went to Egypt in search of security ([Genesis 42-45](#)); a new Pharaoh rose to power and the Hebrew people moved from guests to enslaved workers. What has happened to the covenant that God had made from the time of creation?

It is significant to note that while the Hebrew people were not enslaved through war, they were exploited for their physical labor. Physical labor would fuel Egypt's military and economic domination of the region. And, it is important to understand that Egypt is the "master's house," a place the enslaved Hebrew's had built. Journeying toward freedom, the Hebrew people realized this world was not at all like Egypt. There were actually alternatives to the exploitation they had experienced. Both economic injustice and slavery were not inevitable. The Hebrew word *abad*, defined as the *freedom to serve God*, is the same Hebrew word used for *servicing Pharaoh* found in [Exodus 5](#). In other words, the Hebrew people were now free to worship, serve God, and create a new covenant community.

The difference is significant: the freedom to serve God ought never be understood as freedom to exploit those who were caused by the social systems to live in poverty or migrate, and those who were left widowed or orphaned. Theologian and civil rights activist Abraham Joshua Heschel puts it this way, "To be is to obey the commandments. I am because I am called to obey. 'Thou art' precedes 'I am.' Living means acceptance of obedience and commitment."

The 10 Commandments, or Decalogue, detailed in [Exodus 20:1-21](#) and [Deuteronomy 5:1-21](#), fulfills the covenant promise that God made with Abraham and Sarah in [Deuteronomy 29](#) and [Exodus 19:5-16](#). In other words, through this covenant, God privileges the needs of the weak over the wants of the strong and mandates a just response. How do we understand this? Do we experience freedom from systems of racialized social hierarchies as freedom to be fully human and to obey God above all others? How differently does our culture understand freedom and how does our understanding affect our spiritual life and our society?

[John 2:13-22](#)

The dramatic image of Jesus walking into the Temple and overturning the money-changing tables is difficult to erase and the context of this story is complex. You have perhaps heard many interpretations of it over the years. We will offer you an interpretation informed by Professor Amy-Jill Levine, a Jewish New Testament scholar who teaches at Vanderbilt Divinity School (see [Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week](#), Abingdon: 2018). Her perspective is useful to understanding the institution of the Temple, and therefore the reasons why Jesus behaves as he does in the story.

The Temple was the center of Jewish worship where Jews renewed their covenant with God. It was the only place where Jews could offer the sacrifices required for reconciliation with God. It served as a tourist attraction, a bank, the symbolic and cultural center of Judaism, a pilgrimage site for festivals such as Passover, and a house of prayer “for all nations.” Levine suggests that Jesus was *not* enraged by the fact of currency exchange or the purchase of sacrifices in the Temple, because these practices were necessary to welcome visitors and the Jews didn’t want the extra burden of carrying their sacrifices from afar. Evidence *doesn’t* suggest that the community is otherwise condoning the practice of exploiting pilgrims with exorbitant exchange rates.

Instead, by focusing on Jesus’ words in this passage, we see an allusion to [Zachariah 14:20-21](#), which envisions a day when there no longer *needs* to be a marketplace in the Temple because access to reconciliation with God can happen *everywhere*. A paraphrased version of these verses is, “The cooking pots in all the homes of Judah will be as sacred as those in the Temple ... and so there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord.” In other words, there will be a time when the Temple is transformed. This brings Jesus’ claim about raising the Temple in three days into focus, too. Jesus’ body becomes the new Temple; Jesus’ ministry is our model for discipleship; and we have access to reconciliation with God through Jesus, from anywhere.

Jesus demonstrated that there is no longer a need for a set-aside marketplace to receive God’s grace; and as such, we have even less of an excuse to divide our lives into “worship at church” and the “regular programming” of our lives. The division between the sacred and the secular is artificial. Jesus has brought the sacredness at the center of the Temple into each community, home, and heart. Can we live in such a way that honors this unity? Do we worship God with our whole lives? Our interactions with others? Our prayers?

Our downtime? Our spending and investment? Do our diverse communities and cultural, social, economic and political systems reflect this commitment to the dignity and sacred worth of all? What does it look like when all people are treated with dignity and sacred worth?

Introduction

Though Scripture is full of evidence that God is concerned with how God's people use their money, wealth, and other resources, this can be a challenging subject to discuss in church. Our session this week emerges out of that strong tradition in Scripture, and we focus on how money and wealth give us an opportunity to manifest our spiritual callings and ethical priorities. We reflect on the many ways we participate in the economic landscape in our communities: as workers, investors, shoppers, voters, and givers. We engage creative and prophetic ways to address the economic injustices experienced by Black, Brown, and Indigenous people -- those perpetuated historically and those that extend into the present. We consider God's invitation to change practices in our lives that do not reflect the covenant God has given us for how we should live in community, and explore the ways the Social Principles and Resolutions give us concrete examples of how to do this faithfully.

Opening prayer

[From poet Maya Angelou](#)

Father, Mother God, Thank you for your presence

during the hard and mean days.
For then we have you to lean upon.

Thank you for your presence
during the bright and sunny days,
for then we can share that which we have
with those who have less.

And thank you for your presence
during the Holy Days, for then we are able
to celebrate you and our families
and our friends.

For those who have no voice,
we ask you to speak.

For those who feel unworthy,
we ask you to pour your love out
in waterfalls of tenderness.

For those who live in pain,
we ask you to bathe them
in the river of your healing.

For those who are lonely, we ask
you to keep them company.

For those who are depressed,
we ask you to shower upon them
the light of hope.

Dear Creator, You, the borderless
sea of substance, we ask you to give all the
world that which we need most -- Peace.

- Maya Angelou

Group Discussion

(Optional activities are in the sidebar to enable a customized experience.)

Foundations of the Social Principles: The UMC Social Creed

Reflect

1. Why do you think talking about money can be so uncomfortable?
Does your church discuss it often? Given how powerful a tool money is for creating the type of world we want to live in, do you think your church should talk about it more or less?
2. How has your relationship with money changed over the years? How has your racial or ethnic identity informed your experience of money, wealth, debt, and investments?
3. How we invest our resources and how we stand in solidarity with “the least of these” are prominent themes in Scripture. When listing “the least of these” in Scripture, we often see references to the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers (travelers). How would you describe populations that are particularly vulnerable to exploitation in the present?
4. United Methodists pledge to establish just, equitable, and sustainable economies that support abundant life for all. The new 2021 Social Principles say, “We reject religious teachings that view the accumulation of wealth as a sign of God’s favor and poverty as a sign of God’s disfavor. We reject preferential treatment in the church based on wealth and income. We also commit to work toward eradicating unjust practices, policies, and systems that have condemned entire generations to live in unrelenting poverty.” These are powerful words. Have you encountered religious teachers who connect wealth as a sign of God’s favor? If we do not approach wealth as a special blessing from God, how should we think about it? Does increased wealth create increased responsibility for our neighbors?
5. Which of the 10 Commandments addresses income and income disparity?
6. What did you learn from the Scripture reflection exercises this week? Did anything challenge you? What have you continued to reflect on in light of this week’s Scripture?

Watch Together

Watch [Living Our Principles](#) Episode 5, Chapter 3--Politics, Power & the World: Emira Woods. (Play for 8 min)

Optional Activity: (20 min)

The group leader will read a series of statements. In response, each participant should silently hold up a piece of paper (or raise their hand or use an on-screen response if doing this study virtually) if they identify with each statement. During each response, notice who is raising a card with you...notice who is not...notice how you feel...and lower your card.

Please raise your card if you were brought up believing that America is a land of opportunity where anyone can make it if they just try hard enough regardless of their race.

Please raise your card if you had to pay for school or college, pay for books, housing, food, classes and friends of another race had enough money so they did not need to work.

Please raise your card if you have ever felt uncomfortable, uneasy or angry about a remark or joke or comment about the amount of money people in your racial group have earned.

Please raise your card if you were ever discouraged from pursuing a particular career or tracked into a particular career because of your race.

Please raise your card if you have been accused of theft, or

Take Action

(Leaders should choose the path for reflection given the time remaining.)

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many workers who earn below a living wage have been recognized as “essential.” The United Methodist Church resists oppressive practices when it says, “A living wage in a safe and healthy workplace with reasonable hours of work is a universal right not restricted by national borders.” (Book of Resolutions 4101: Living Wage Model).

Advocate with your legislators for economic relief packages and long-term structural reform measures that include unemployment benefits, paid sick leave, access to child-care, increased worker’s wages, and health and safety protections in the workplace. These policies will directly impact all workers, but especially communities of color.

2. Commit to read the [Resolution in Support of Reparations for African Americans](#) (2016 Book of Resolutions, #3066). This resolution describes the plight of millions of men, women, and children caused by the transatlantic slave trade. It highlights the legacy of unjust economic distribution of land and resources and requires that we address the right to secure reparations or satisfaction for the legacy of economic damage. Learn more about the late congressman John Conyers, Jr.’s aspirations in [H.R. 40 to the House of Representatives](#), calling for the establishment of the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans. Consider, and read Ta-Nehisi Coates’ essay “[The Case for Reparations](#)” Reach out to your members of Congress to find out their position on the question of reparations. Not sure who it is? [Check here](#).

3. Research local programs you can support that invest in and provide resources to minority-run small businesses. Perhaps these include micro-financing loans, incubator or apprenticeship programs, or grant writing classes. Learn more about the landscape of support that exists for minority-run business owners so that you reflect on how you can contribute to this effort.

followed in store, or accused of cheating because of your race.

Please raise your card if you have been stopped by the police because you were driving through the wrong neighborhood in the wrong kind of automobile and you understood that it was because of your race.

Please raise your card if you or your ancestors were forced to come to the US, forced to relocate from where they lived, restricted to pay rent or to purchase a home in certain neighborhoods based on your race.

Please raise your card if you have ever overheard people saying that you and your people ought to go back to where you came from.

Please raise your card if you grew up with or currently employ house cleaners, gardeners, or full-time baby-sitters who are of a different race than you.

Please raise your card if you don’t exactly know what region or areas your European/American ancestors came from.

Please raise your card if you have seen people of your race portrayed in a positive way to sell a product.

Please raise your card if you choose not to purchase products made by companies who hire

Closing Prayer

[From A Blessing for Workers and All Seeking Work](#)

Blessed are you, ever-creating God,

In your image, our lives are made and in your glory, we offer all the work of our hearts, and hands, and minds.

Blessed are you, O God, now and forever!

Blessed are you whose work is repaid, for by your work, and by the payment you receive, your lives and the lives of others around you and around the world are blessed.

We thank God for you day-by-day.

Blessed are you whose work is unpaid, who offer what you can to enrich the lives of others, through time, talents, skill, strength, and love.

We praise God for your generous labor!

Blessed are you who seek work but have not found it, or whose work now is not yet what it may be, yet still you seek, that your gifts may be shared more fully.

We praise God for your diligent seeking and pray you may soon find what you seek.

Yours is the glory in their labors.

Yours be the glory in all our lives, in Jesus' name. Amen.

See [Appendix B](#)
for recommended
additional resources
on this topic.

sweatshop or child labor (for example: Adidas, Abercrombie & Fitch, Forever 21, Old Navy, Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, H&M, Converse, Holister, Disney) located primarily in Black and Brown countries in the global south.

After the final statement is read, the leader reads this verse aloud - Micah 6:8. "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Discuss what feelings came up during the exercise and what surprised you most about your own or others' responses.

Additional Videos:

These videos reflect some of the ways that our economic practices connect us to each other, from the global landscape to the local landscape. Discuss your responses to the videos.

Living Our Principles [Episode 4](#), Chapter 1: Detroit--community development and advocacy (play for 16 min).

Living Our Principles [Episode 4](#), Chapter 4: Democratic Republic of the Congo--the importance of economic security and micro-lending (play for 2 min).

Living Our Principles [Episode 4](#), Chapter 5: Appalachia--Economics, memory and a different future (play for 7 min).

Session 5:

Promoting Peace and Restorative Justice

Fourth Sunday in Lent March 14.

Core Preparation:

[Numbers 21:4-9](#), [John 3:14-20](#)

Read and set aside 10-15 minutes to reflect on [Numbers 21:4-9](#) and [John 3:14-20](#) using the meditations below. Please read the Scriptures twice. The first time you read it, read the text to become aware of the story. The second time you read it, read a little slower. Let God guide you to the words or phrases that God would like to draw your attention to. We will study the Scripture together in our group.

Read the proposed 2021 [Social Principles](#): The Political Community, Preface, A. Church and Governments, B. Civil Disobedience, C. Restorative Justice, E. Criminal Justice, starting on page 32.

Read UM Resolution 3379: [Stop Criminalizing Communities of Color in the United States](#)

Read UM Resolution 5031: [Humanizing Criminal Justice](#)

This video, [Restorative Circles](#), explains what restorative practices are and how they are used in a handful of Baltimore City schools, with great results, as a way to resolve conflict and build positive relationships, including a drop in suspensions, more positive school and work climates, and increased levels of trust, empathy, and respect. (2 min)

Introduction

This week's Lenten Scriptures introduce two very strong scriptural images that point to the power of transformation: the snake and the light. Both seem to appear in liminal spaces, where people in the text find themselves caught between suffering and healing, life lived in despair and life longing for hope. Perhaps, you can relate to that space. These are places where the covenant promises seem most fragile and where we need to be reminded that God is present with us in every situation, even when we doubt God is listening, or moving or willing to act.

Many things in our society may cause us to despair, but the church is a place where we can come for inspiration, vision, and for practical ways to respond to these broken systems.

What needs to be transformed? Both the current and proposed Social Principles and Resolutions invite us to specifically address how racism influences the criminal justice system, and calls us to question how laws in our society could be changed to focus on restoring relationships and repairing harm. Christians have a long legacy of public witness in relationship to the governments that maintain systems and political order in society. By the end of the session, we may sense where God may be calling us to take a risk and restore broken relationships.

Opening prayer

[Opening prayer from the Iona Community](#)

We believe that God is present in the darkness before dawn;
in the waiting and uncertainty,
where fear and courage join hands, conflict and caring link arms,
and the sun rises over barbed wire.
We believe in a with-us God,
Who sits down in our midst to share our humanity.

Group Discussion

(An optional activity is the sidebar to enable a customized experience.)

[Numbers 21:4-9, John 3:14-21](#)

Read the two Scriptures as a group.

The once-enslaved and now liberated Hebrews were impatient as they hiked across the Sinai Peninsula. They felt caged by the inertia of the situation, unable to move forward and yet fearful of moving backward. Was their new covenant worth it? How do we live the covenant when we cannot see the promised land?

Brainstorm around the images of endless wandering and that gnawing feeling of impatience that come up in the Numbers text. When was the last time you felt like you were wandering aimlessly, or lacking clear direction, growing more and more impatient with yourself and with others? What sensations do you notice in your body when you hear this text?

The Hebrew people were free but they had not yet experienced all that their freedom would mean for them. Even worse, many had little clarity about where God was taking them or why. They yearned for an assurance that there is a different world than the one their ancestors knew as enslaved people back in Egypt. Those who have experienced incarceration or who have a relationship with someone who has been incarcerated, locked up, confined and then released back into an unhealthy, unsafe, and unwelcoming environment, may particularly empathize with this story.

Imagine what it would be like to lack clarity in where God is taking you and to feel anxious about the environment that you find yourself in. What would you need? How would you find support?

Read aloud this excerpt, below, from Dr. Martin Luther King's brilliant [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#), which expresses this sense of impatience with the way things are. (See also a [reading of the letter](#).)

We affirm a faith that takes us beyond the safe place into action,
into vulnerability, and into the streets.

We commit ourselves to work for change and put us on the line;
to bear responsibility, to take risks, live powerfully and face humiliation;
to stand with those on the edge;
to chose life and be used by the Spirit,
for God's new community of hope. Amen.

Optional activity : Watch Together

Watch [Living Our Principles](#) Episode 4, Chapter 2--Oklahoma: How is Restorative Justice impacting women who have been incarcerated and what the Church says about private prisons? (play for 11 min).

What surprised you about this story? How is transformation through restorative justice in our system of mass incarceration practices essential to becoming an antiracist church and society?

"For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never!' As one of our distinguished jurists once said, 'Justice too long delayed is justice denied!' We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say 'Wait.'

But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your 20 million Negro brothers smothering in an air-tight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society... when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience."

How do we hear Dr. King's words and understand the relevance for his commitment to direct acts of civil disobedience to change laws today?

The snake is a powerful allegory for naming what has harmed and injured the community and that now creates momentum and movements for change. We can actually renew our purpose by "defanging" and uncloaking the causes of pain, sickness, and oppression and begin the process of restoration and healing, even though we know we have not yet reached the promised land. [John 3:14-20](#) employs yet another image that we may be even more familiar with: light. "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ... But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God." Light reveals what is hidden. Light has a way of bringing to the surface and out into the open that which has been denied, avoided, and neglected in our society.

What practices that support racism still need to be brought into the wonderful healing light, especially in situations regarding the U.S. mass incarceration and criminalization of Black and Brown communities, and health care disparities among communities of color?

Who economically and socially benefits from these unjust practices? This week of Lent, when we practice being antiracist, how will we slowly welcome the light and find ourselves bathed in its strength?

Reflect

Discuss UM Resolution 3379, [Stop Criminalizing Communities of Color in the United States](#)

Have you or someone you know experienced racial profiling?

What images from [Numbers 21:4-9](#) and [John 3:14-20](#) resonate with you in light of the challenge we have confronting the criminalization of communities of color?

Do you see parallels between the Scripture and what is happening in our society today?

Take Action

(Choose one or more actions that fit where your group is right now and what you are able to do as a team.)

Advocate with your legislators to make the enforcement and protection of international human rights law central to criminal justice and immigration policy.

Set up a meeting with your local law enforcement and demand an end to racial/ethnic/religious profiling and an end to “zero tolerance” policies in public schools.

Learn about the situation of immigrants in your community and meet with immigrant communities to learn about how family detention may have affected them. Invite an immigration attorney from [Justice for Our Neighbors](#), immigration clinics supported by The United Methodist Church, to speak to your group.

Advocate for an end to all incarceration of children in compliance with the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (2012 Book of Resolutions, #3281).

Invite your congregation to watch the movie “[13th](#)”, about the 13th Amendment and the history of incarceration and racism in the U.S.

Based on the film, which is available on YouTube and Netflix, determine how you can lift your voice to end mandatory sentencing laws and mandatory detention policies, affirm judicial discretion in sentencing and deportation rulings, and restore the full citizenship rights, including the vote, to US citizens with felony convictions.

Map the businesses in your area and work with them to remove barriers to employment and increase the ability of those who have been incarcerated to secure housing and supportive services.

Closing Prayer

[*Prayer from a Book of Uncommon Prayer by Kenji Kuramitsu*](#)

Jesus Christ, Son of God,
who promised in his first sermon,
to break the chains of the oppressed and set the prisoners free,
break apart our wrecked and ruined (in)justice system.

Do not let profits strangle your prophets any longer,
but be with us and teach us not to tolerate these practices,
from this day forward.

Amen.

See [Appendix B](#)
for recommended
additional resources
on this topic.

Session 6:

Transforming the Context of Hate to Love

Fifth Sunday in Lent + Palm Sunday Scripture March 21

Core Preparation:

1. Proposed 2021 [UM Social Principles](#): The Political Community, F. Indigenous, Native and Aboriginal People; G. Migrants, Immigrants and Refugees; J. Religious Minorities (starting at page 32)
2. 2016 Book of Resolutions, #3422, "[Speaking Out for Compassion: Transforming the Context of Hate in the United States](#)."
3. [Mark 11:1-11](#)

Set aside 10 minutes to read and jot down notes and reflections on this story. Read it at least twice, preferably once aloud.

As we approach the end of this Lenten journey and our time together, we are getting closer to Easter. Soon we will read the stories of Holy Week, beginning here, with the procession of Jesus into Jerusalem. Each Gospel tells this story a bit differently and we, who know the contours of the coming weeks, understand that the celebration of Jesus as King wanes quickly as many in positions of power hear about the disruptive nature of his Kingdom.

How often do we find ourselves in the shoes of these Palm Sunday shouters of "Hosanna?" How often do we want to welcome Jesus into our lives, seeking the grace and salvation he promises, only to hesitate when we become aware of the kind of transformation he calls us to? We welcome him as King, but do we really want to live by the laws of his Kingdom? It can be hard to tell.

Each of our relationships with Jesus is different and full of its own twists and turns and spirals of meaning; we have sought to worship well, to be faithful followers, to believe rightly, and to love our neighbors. And yet, as our culture and society continue to shift, we are constantly presented with new challenges about what that love looks like.

Over these past weeks, we have dug into the Scripture of the season and explored ways that our faith tradition expresses our responsibilities to each other. We have considered the wounds and legacies of racism and how the call to antiracism may be one of the ways love looks like for us right now. We have read and wrestled with guidance from leaders in our church about realities that may be challenging to us in their complexity, their politics, and their gravity. Perhaps we have felt the truth of what Frederick Douglas said, that "power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and it never will."

So, as we consider how we intend to welcome Jesus as King in the coming weeks, we invite you to take a

few moments and take stock of your feelings. What questions, or concerns, or barriers regarding the work of antiracism can you identify in yourself or in your community? Where are your own horizons of growth and understanding? What stories about responding faithfully to racial injustice -- from this study or from other sources -- remain lodged in your heart? How do they inspire you to act? And, do you see these actions as one of the ways we welcome Jesus' Kingdom? Why or why not?

Introduction

As we come to an end of our Lenten journey, we take stock of what transformations and challenges we have encountered during our time together. We continue to reflect on the webs of relationships that shape our lives -- with God, with those close to us, and with those we will never meet -- and how our faith draws us into covenant with all of God's people. Though the evils of racism and all of the other "isms" that mock the creativity of God are pervasive in our world, we find energy and inspiration to embrace new ways of being. Though there are many stories to hear, many lessons to learn, and many prayers to pray, we focus this week on staying grounded in what motivates us and gives us the courage to continue to walk in the way that leads to abundant life for all.

Opening prayer

Together, in a spirit of prayer, watch this video "[Shed a Little Light](#)," originally by James Taylor. This version is a collaboration between two a cappella groups, the Maccabeats and Naturally 7.

The calls to justice in Scripture claim our interconnectedness beyond our individual relationships. And yet, our individual relationships are one of the ways that God "sheds a little light" into our lives. They're where we challenge our biases, learn what it means to have different experiences, and find common ground. We share the dream of "being bound together in ties of hope and love." It is often our personal relationships that help us to more deeply understand our interconnectedness with all people. Of course, we should be thoughtful when reflecting on these relationships to not let stereotypes inform how they shape us. With these things in mind, pause and consider a cross-racial experience or relationship you have had that has been meaningful to you. Share with the group.

Group Discussion

Reflect

Read [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#) as a group aloud twice, from different translations, if available.

1. Again, we encounter the theme of God's constant return to broken human communities to create covenant with us. Here, we have a promise of a new covenant, a covenant that is written on our hearts, and a promise of a time when the ethics and laws detailing our right relationship with God and with each other are no longer an external thing to be learned, but a set of internalized truths to simply be lived. Why do you think the promise of a new covenant is a source of hope for the Israelites, who received it through the prophet Jeremiah? What happened to the prior covenant?
2. Christians live under a different covenant with God, made through Jesus. On Maundy Thursday, we will remember the Last Supper, when Jesus gave his disciples the practice of Communion as a sign of this

covenant. We reclaim the impact of this covenant on our faith and our lives every time we participate in Communion. What are your favorite parts of the Communion liturgy? Of the practice of Communion? ([Find the traditional communion liturgy here](#), if desired.)

Though the full liturgy is beautiful, consider the line that comes towards the end of the prayer, asking God to make “us be the body of Christ for the world, redeemed by his blood.” Each time we celebrate Communion, we ask God to transform us and send us out into the world to continue the ministry of Jesus. This ministry includes the work of using the influence and the power we have to heal relationships and to heal systems that dehumanize other children of God.

3. As you consider ways your life and church’s ministry will be impacted by this study, take a moment to reflect on what you hope a new covenant that covers all people could look like. You may choose to refer back to the resolutions and the Social Principles you have read so far. Go around the group and invite each participant to share one “term” of a new covenant that is part of their dream for the world.

Watch Together: Excerpts from Living Our Principles

[Episode 3: Together in Community](#), Chapter 4--Nigeria: focusing on tolerance and common security across Islam and Christianity (play for 7 min).

1. Discuss the video clip in light of the resolution on “speaking out for compassion” and the Social Principles you read for the week, and share your observations and reactions.
2. Note that the work described by this video is grounded in the leaders not believing that a particular arrangement of power and relationships is inevitable. They dare to dream dreams, and to imagine new ways of being that will lead to peace. In your own contexts, what systems feel like they are inevitable, that is, that they cannot be changed?
3. Sometimes, one of the most significant reasons Christians feel paralyzed in the face of big social problems is because they seem too big, too complex, too ingrained. It’s hard to know where to start. [Charles Wesley](#), author of hundreds of poems and hymns, once wrote this verse (it’s been set to different tunes over time, but the meter fits with “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” as well):

*Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees
And looks to God alone;
Laughs at impossibilities
And cries: It shall be done!*

The promise of God’s Kingdom shows us that the work of antiracism is not impossible. The new life we will claim in Jesus’ resurrection very soon shows us that we dare not place limits on the bounds of God’s vision for our world. God is always doing new things.

This work requires all of us. We invite you to share stories about times when someone did something “impossible.” Note any commonalities shared by these stories. Perhaps they feature qualities like discipline, tenacity, resilience, community support, and receiving a little grace from others. What inspiration do you take from them today, in light of the dreaming exercise we did earlier?

Take Action

To do a difficult thing, you have to start. Having come through this study, you have encountered many resources from the church that can be starting points for you: the Social Principles, the Book of Resolutions, the stories of bold and dynamic ministries around the world, and the rich tradition of your theological home. In addition to building on the actions you’ve taken as a result of the prior sessions, review the actions in the following list. After a brief period of quiet reflection, discuss how each group member plans to put their learning into action this week, and possible areas of focus for the future:

1. Commit to one facet of antiracist policy work at a time. It is not faithful to try to do everything all at once. Discern how God is calling you to contribute, through prayer and the accountability of your church community, and act accordingly.
2. Be mindful of the ways that awareness of racism can bring a level of awkwardness to your relationships and claim that as part of the process of transformation. Own your learning. Ask questions. Interrupt jokes. Listen.
3. Join in the good work that’s already happening. Join groups on social media highlighting antiracism work in your community or state. Find local churches and organizations you can partner with. Honor the leadership of those with expertise.
4. Visit the websites of your local representatives at the city, county, state, and/or national level and learn how they are supporting antiracist work. Send them a letter of gratitude if you like what you see. Send them a letter urging them to prioritize this if that’s needed.

Closing Prayer

[Companion Litany to the Social Creed](#) (scroll down a bit once the page opens)

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace

**to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.**

Today is the day
God cares for the integrity of creation,
wills the healing and wholeness of all life,
weeps at the plunder of earth's goodness.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God cries with the masses of starving people,
despises growing disparity between rich and poor,

demands justice for workers in the marketplace.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God deplores violence in our homes and streets,
rebukes the world's warring madness,
humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God calls for nations and peoples to live in peace,
celebrates where justice and mercy embrace,
exults when the wolf grazes with the lamb.

And so shall we.

**Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.**

And so shall we.

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Appendix A: Group Covenant

We invite you to agree as a group on what covenant best serves how you will share your experiences each week. We invite you each week to review the covenant and consider it as a blessing to help hold your time together as sacred.

You may want to incorporate the commitment to Create a Beloved Community that is being used by the Baltimore-Washington Conference:

- I will seek relationship because this is how Jesus lived.
- I will respect different forms of expression, understanding that I may not really know what is going on.
- I will examine my own assumptions and perceptions so that I might avoid projecting my cultural values onto others.
- I will assume positive intent as we are all moving onto perfection.
- I will listen for understanding because agreement is optional.
- I will exercise cultural humility, understanding that the world into which I was born is just one model of reality.



Here are some additional examples of the types of statements you might want to include in your Group Covenant.

- We will welcome the Spirit who offers transformation.
- We will use "I" statements speaking from our own experiences.
- We will center the experiences of those whose lives and voices have been marginalized, oppressed, or neglected by majority groups in our discussions.
- We will take accountability for what we each say and practice amnesty. We recognize that people can change deeply held convictions when a new position is presented in a way that makes sense to them, when they trust the person presenting another position, and when they are not blamed for trusting mis-information.
- We will step in and step out; giving one another the time and space to both listen and to speak.
- We will prioritize building and deepening relationships with each other.
- We will maintain confidentiality. If we appreciate something from someone else's story, we will first receive their permission to share it. We will focus on what we have learned from their story.
- We will welcome discomfort because this is where growth happens.
- We will strive to take care of ourselves and to stay engaged in the entire study.

Appendix B: Going Deeper

Additional Preparation Resources

Depending upon your experience with the content of this study, you may want to include or replace core preparation items with one or more of the following. These are a mix of resources from different sources that we think will provide interesting perspectives for your discussion and continued exploration of these topics and material. Including these resources here is not a blanket endorsement of the individuals featured. We share these as part of a continued invitation to reflect.

Session 1:

- Ibram X. Kendi's brief explanation of his antiracism framework (5 min)
- Jane Elliot's Antiracism activity on Oprah (1992) (32 min)
- Introducing the New Social Principles (6 min)
- Watch Dismantling Racism: A Service of Lament | The United Methodist Church (umc.org) (60 min)
- Read Statement on racism from Ebony bishops

Session 2:

- TED talk: Racism and food insecurity - Malik Yankini (15 min)
- TED talk: Climate justice can't happen without racial justice - David Lammy (9 min)
- Young Methodists Plant Churches with Environmental Gospel
- Explore and learn more about United Methodist Creation Care Teams
- Explore your local Interfaith Power and Light chapter for resources highlighting local issues and lobbying efforts on environmental justice
- Creation Justice Ministries

Session 3:

- Watch Debbie Irving's excellent video on "Our Whitewashed History" (10 min)
- Listen to the "Seeing White" Podcast and especially episode 2, "How Race Was Made" (28 min)

- Read this article, "The Garbage Man: Why I Collect Racist Objects" by David Pilgrim | [warning: contains graphic descriptions of racist objects]
- Social Principles, the Rights of Racial and Ethnic Persons
- Watch Emerging leaders discuss dismantling racism | The United Methodist Church (umc.org) (53 min)
- Genes Beans. Genetics Studies Prove We're All More Alike than Different: You can't argue with biology, but history has other ideas.

Session 4:

- Listen to this three-minute story on NPR, "Racist Housing Practices From The 1930s Linked To Hotter Neighborhoods Today" (3 min)
- Watch this animation documentary by Mark Lopez's "Segregated By Design" as it reveals the unspoken history of how federal, state, and local governments unconstitutionally segregated major metropolitan areas in the US through law and policy. The documentary is based on the tremendous book, "The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America" by Richard Rothstein. (17 min)
- "A History of Microfinance" with Muhammad Yunus illustrates microlending and micro-credit has made a world of difference in the lives of families living in poverty. (23 min)

Session 5:

- Watch “Everyone Counts: Accessing Health Care and Addressing Health Disparities in a COVID-19 Era” hosted by the Baltimore-Washington Conference and featuring Dr. Lisa Cooper and Dr. Chidinma Ibe who discuss the health disparities and marginalized communities. (60 min)
- Bryan Stevenson, who founded the Equal Justice Initiative shares some hard truths about America’s justice system, starting with a massive imbalance along racial lines: a third of the country’s African-American male population has been incarcerated at some point in their lives. These issues are wrapped up in U.S unexamined history. “We need to talk about an injustice.” (23 min)
- From Slavery to Mass Incarceration. Ava DuVernay’s new documentary chronicles how our justice system has been driven by racism from the days of slavery to today’s era of mass incarceration. The United States accounts for 5 percent of the world’s population, but 25 percent of its prisoners. In 2014, more than 2 million people were incarcerated in the United States—of those, 40 percent were African-American men. According to the Sentencing Project, African-American males born today have a one-in-three chance of going to prison in their lifetimes if incarceration trends continue. (13 min)
- Living Our Principles Episode 5: Politics, Power & the World Chapter 1: U.S. Senator Richard Lugar (00-9:35). This video features Senator Richard Lugar who is a United Methodist layperson. Sen. Lugar reminds us that people of faith cannot ignore the political arena. In this episode, we hear from persons who chose to take public office because of their faith. We are reminded that people of faith are joining advocacy groups to construct a unified voice for social change. (9 min)

- What is Restorative Justice and Restorative Justice Practices? Key principles of restorative justice include: A repair of the damage or a righting of the wrong to those harmed; A path of real accountability - making things right in so far as possible - with those harmed and the disrupted community.
- United Methodist Women - Racial Justice, Mass Incarceration and the Criminalization of Communities of Color: A United Methodist Women Priority UMW School to Prison Pipeline Bible Study.
- UM Resolution 5038. Caring for Victims of Crime.
- Resilient and Resistant Conversations sponsored by Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century (SBC21)
- “What Would You Do?” How will bystanders in Portland react when they witness someone sawing the lock off a bike? Will the reactions change if the would-be thief is a different race or gender? What Would You Do? Scenario broadcast in July 2016. (8 min)

Session 6:

- Review this video (or transcript) to learn about the United Methodist Church’s “Act of Repentance” initiative, which engaged indigenous peoples from the Philippines, Norway, and the US. (4min)
- Read about the detention by ICE officers of Binsar Siahaan on United Methodist Church property, and on the successful public outcry that led to his return home.
- Read about a 2019 United Methodist action in solidarity with migrants and asylum seekers at the southern border with Mexico.
- Watch Intersectionality: Dismantling Racism Panel Discussion | The United Methodist Church (umc.org). (52 min)

Additional Antiracism Resources:

- Visit the BWC’s Racial Justice page for hundreds of additional antiracism resources.

Appendix C:

Glossary of Terms

We have included a Glossary of Terms that we frequently hear in our work around racism. We hope that these definitions will help to clarify words that are often used but that are not always defined. We encourage you to become familiar with these terms and definitions and to help educate others in your congregation on their importance and their usefulness in dismantling racism and promoting antiracist attitudes and behaviors.

ANTI-OPPRESSION:

The process of making one's view of the world large enough to include all. Antiracism is a form of anti-oppression or making the connection among different people's struggles against oppression. Anti-oppression means not just not accepting 'norms,' and 'isms' as stagnant and inevitable, but actively working to make the invisible visible, and challenging and dismantling the systems that hold them in place.

An anti-oppression analysis acknowledges that all forms of oppression are linked and that the best way to organize against one form of oppression such as racism is to take into account that all oppressions are linked. When we practice antiracist actions we will become more aware of other forms of harm and ways we can confront and engage in systemic change.

ANTIRACISM:

Antiracism is an active state and one is antiracist when expressing antiracist ideas or actively supporting antiracist policies. Policies and those with power to implement and change policies should be the primary target of antiracist actions. People can (and do!) regularly support both racist ideas and antiracist ideas; sometimes in back-to-back sentences. This means that each moment presents us with a choice to act in antiracist ways and that our past choices and actions do not define our potential.

BIAS:

Once we have learned about each other, stereotypes and prejudices may still resist change, even when evidence fails to support their assertions or points to the contrary. People can embrace anecdotes that reinforce their biases, but disregard experience that contradicts them. The statement "Some of my best friends are..." captures this tendency to allow some exceptions without changing our bias.

Bias is perpetuated by conformity with in-group attitudes and socialization by the culture at large. Mass media routinely takes advantage of stereotypes as shorthand to paint a mood, scene, or character of particular ethnic or racial groups. Elders, for example, are routinely portrayed as being frail and forgetful, while younger people are frequently shown as vibrant and able. Stereotypes can also be conveyed by omission in popular culture, as when the media present an all-white world. The result is unquestioned bias.

COLONIZATION:

Emma LaRocque has defined colonization as a “form of invasion, dispossession, and subjugation of a peoples...The result of such incursion is the dispossession of vast amounts of lands from the original inhabitants.” Colonization is often legalized after the fact. The long-term result of such massive dispossession is institutionalized inequality. The colonizer/colonized relationship is by nature an unequal one that benefits the colonizer at the expense of the colonized.

Colonization provides colonizers with political power and control, economic wealth through the exploitation of peoples and resources which have been transformed into commodities, and social power with the dominance of a colonizer's cultural practices and beliefs as normative. Colonization is an ongoing process which continues to provide political/economic/social benefits to the colonizers. Settler colonialism is a specific example of a process by which colonists migrate with the express purposes of usurping indigenous sovereignty, expanding territorial occupation, and the forming of a new, dominant community rather than limiting their relationship to the economic extraction of resources and subjugation of indigenous peoples.

CULTURE:

The learned and shared values of interacting with people.

CULTURAL GENERALIZATION:

The tendency of a majority of people in a cultural group to hold certain values and beliefs, and to engage in certain patterns of behavior.

CULTURAL STEREOTYPE:

The application of a generalization to every person in a cultural group; or, generalizing from only a few people in a group.

DENIAL:

A person in denial shows “disinterest in and/ or avoidance of cultural difference with little recognition of more complex cultural differences.”

A denial mindset reflects more limited experience and capability for understanding and appropriately responding to cultural differences in values, beliefs, perceptions, emotional responses, and behaviors. Denial consists of a disinterest in other cultures and a more active avoidance of cultural differences. Individuals with a denial mindset often do not see differences in perceptions and behavior as “cultural.” A denial orientation is characteristic of individuals who have limited experience with other cultural groups and, therefore, tend to operate with broad stereotypes and generalizations about the cultural “other.” Those in denial may also maintain a distance from other cultural groups and express little interest in learning about the cultural values and practices of diverse communities. When denial is present in the workplace, cultural diversity oftentimes feels “ignored.”

When we experience our own culture and race as normal or normative we are thinking and acting in an ethnocentric way that supports racism. This may happen when we lack relationships with or familiarity with racial groups other than our own or when we are disinterested in another's culture or race.

An example could be that different racial groups are expected to all fit into one national culture; they must learn about our organization and how we do things, they speak our language, dress as we do. But these expectations are usually based on limited stereotypes of who our race and culture are. Denial of differences, denial of a clash of racial differences and a defense of the dominant racial group perpetuate an "us against them" way of thinking and behaving.

DISCRIMINATION:

Behavior that treats people unequally, inequitably, or unfairly based on the group that they belong to.

DIVERSITY:

Diversity is about representation. Diversity can be measured through numbers and tracked by nationality, for example through nationality, race, gender identity, sexual identity, age, education, economic status. In other words, we are a diverse group because, "You have been invited to the party!"

EQUITY:

Equity is about fairness and especially fairness in how procedures and processes are determined and enacted. Equity is about building power and authority through relationships and not domination. Equity involves how we distribute resources. Equity exists when disparities in the outcomes experienced by historically under-represented populations have been eliminated.

Equity means, "You can contribute to defining what is included in planning the party and you have the authority to influence and invite people to the party. You have power."

Equity implies a greater sense of belonging. "You know that it's your party too and you can contribute to planning it or you can skip it if you want to!"

INCLUSION:

The act of including or being included within a group or structure. Inclusion is about participation and is most often measured by actions and perceptions and is usually achieved when diverse groups of people are involved in decision making that impacts the practices and policies of an organization. In other words, "You are invited to plan the party and are an active participant!"

MINIMIZATION:

Highlights cultural commonality that can mask deeper recognition of cultural differences. Cultural differences are perceived in neutral terms—but differences are made sense of and responded to within one's own culturally familiar categories.

Minimization can take one of two forms: (a) the highlighting of commonalities due to limited cultural self-understanding, which is more commonly experienced by dominant group members within a cultural community; or (b) the highlighting of commonalities as a strategy for navigating the values and practices largely determined by the dominant culture group, which is more often experienced by non-dominant group members within a larger cultural community. This latter strategy can have survival value for nondominant culture members and often takes the form of "go along to get along."

We focus on some shared commonalities; for a dominant cultural or racial group, the focus is on what other racial groups have in common with my group. Your culture and race are valuable as long as it fits into how "we" live. In other words, "People are people. We can all just get along. But you should want to be like us."

Here, we focus on eliminating stereotypes and discriminatory behavior at a personal level and promoting tolerance. But the focus is surely not on valuing diversity or adapting ourselves to appreciating and respecting a non-majority racial or ethnic group's culture or story.

POLARIZATION:

Polarization is an evaluative mindset that views cultural differences from an "us versus them" perspective. Polarization can take two forms: Defense - sees cultural differences frequently as divisive and threatening to one's own way of doing things. "My cultural practices are superior to other cultural practices." Reversal - values and may idealize other cultural practices while denigrating one's own culture group. Reversal may also support the "cause" of an oppressed group, but this is done with little knowledge of what the "cause" means to people from the oppressed community. "Other cultures are better than mine."

PREJUDICE:

An opinion, attitude, or judgment about a person or a group that is either positive or negative. Prejudices are usually accompanied by ignorance, fear, or hatred. They are reinforced by powerful psychological processes that determine "in groups" and "out groups" and unfair or inequitable treatment of each group.

PRIVILEGE:

Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than anything they have done or failed to do. Privilege is a visible and at times invisible asset or unearned entitlements—something that people should all have. When an unearned entitlement is restricted to a particular group or specific persons it becomes an unearned advantage that can be passed down to the next generation.

For example, in 2013 when a group of human resource managers were asked, “Why do people in the workplace who identify with dominant or majority racial groups not engage issues of racism?” Their response was that people say they don’t know racism exists in the first place.

People fear bringing it up because they fear this will make it worse. The dominant group may also claim that they have no idea how their racial privilege actually oppresses others. Lack of awareness gives them a dominant racial or ethnic group a low tolerance to listen to the trouble someone else faces because silence is a natural human response. People also don’t respond to the unfairness of unearned racial privilege because people believe they don’t have to. They are not responsible.

Privilege serves to insulate a majority racial group from a minority or non-dominant group and nothing compels their attention until a violent outburst occurs such as a racist assault or racist shooting, or racial slurs spoken in a public space.

People in a majority group also may think racial injustice is a personal problem. They are convinced that individuals get what they deserve.

People also may want to hang onto their racial privilege. The Redskins football team is an excellent example. The United Methodist Church has called for an economic boycott of this team because its name references a historically documented racist stereotype. Finally, a patent court has taken the team’s privilege away to hold the only patent and the economic pressure coupled with public opinion has caused them to search for a new team name.

People are also afraid of being blamed for the persistence of racism if they acknowledge that it exists. People fear rejection by their own racial or ethnic group if they express concern. Pressure from one’s own ethnic or racial group may increase with the competition across racial and ethnic groups because of a loss in jobs or economic insecurity. Maintaining silence to support the system works to maintain their group’s racial and ethnic privilege.

RACE:

The concept of race is socially constructed, developed over centuries partially as a method of social control (McIntosh 2007, 349). Science has shown that race is not biological, but merely an ideology based upon superficial value judgments (Painter 2010, 2).

While race does not accurately represent the patterns of human biological diversity, an abundance of scientific research demonstrates that racism, prejudice against someone because of their race, and a belief in the inherent superiority and inferiority of different racial groups, affects our biology, health, and well-being. This means that race, while not a scientifically accurate biological concept, can have important biological consequences because of the effects of racism. The belief in races as a natural aspect of human biology and the institutional and structural inequities (racism) that have emerged in tandem with such beliefs in European colonial contexts are among the most damaging elements in human societies.

RACIAL IDENTITY:

Racial identity is a multifaceted construct that refers to (a) the qualitative meaning one ascribes to one's own racial group, (b) meaning attributed to other racial groups, (c) sense of group identification with one's own racial group, (d) salience of race in defining one's self-concept, and (e) perspectives regarding race over time.

RACISM:

Race is a construct, a social concept, an idea that helps us make sense of the world we observe. Race is not natural. Racial difference is based on the historical value we assign to groups' physical characteristics that are inferior or superior.

Racism further includes attitudes and behaviors that privilege certain racial or ethnic groups at the expense of others, resulting in an increased threat to their dignity, safety, health, quality of life, and wealth; racism promotes personal and group fear, bias, discrimination, suspicion, scapegoating, harassment, and deprivation resulting in suffering, harm and oppression; racism is built into systems of authority, power and policy, that determine where people live, work and worship and belong; and racism is the pattern of privilege and oppression that creates, perpetuates and legitimates those public patterns and civic systems.

Individual racism is a form of prejudice based on bias held by a particular person.

Cultural racism includes the norms, values, narratives, and stories of a people that are affirmed or denied because of history as determined by a dominant racial group.

Systemic racism is embedded in economic, political, social and cultural structures of a society. Racism is not about bad white people, just like sexism is not about bad men.

Structural racism is a system of social structures that produces and reproduces cumulative, sustained and durable, race based inequalities. Racialized outcomes as a result of structural racism is not dependent on individuals. Focusing on individual instances of racism can have the effect of diverting our attention from the structural changes that are required to achieve racial justice and correct the harm done by structural racism.

For additional information about race, see this article by the Association of American Physical Anthropologists: Statement on Race & Racism.

REDLINING:

Redlining is the systematic denial of various services or goods by federal government agencies, local governments, or the private sector either directly or through the selective raising of prices. This is often manifested by placing strict criteria on specific services and goods that often disadvantage poor and minority communities. (Source: Wikipedia)

STEREOTYPE:

A stereotype is an exaggerated belief, image, or distorted truth about a person or a group, a generalization that allows for little or no individual difference or social variation. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media, reputations and repetitions passed down by our parents, church, educators, peers, and other influential members of society. Stereotypes can be either negative or positive but they are limited and inaccurate.

WHITENESS:

Whiteness and white racialized identity refer to the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups of people are compared. Whiteness is also at the core of understanding race in America. Whiteness and the normalization of white racial identity throughout America's history have created a culture where nonwhite persons are seen as inferior or abnormal.

The term white refers most obviously to light skin, but also denotes those who historically have benefitted from light-skin privilege. Thus, both definitions of whiteness will be considered here when referring to white people. As opposed to the racialization assigned to people of color, whiteness can be defined by its hyper-visibility, which counterintuitively leads to invisibility.

(See, Defining Whiteness: Perspectives on Privilege)

One central importance of whiteness as an analytical concept is that it identifies how the unmarked and normative position of whites is maintained by positing "race" as a category of difference.

WHITE SUPREMACY:

"The belief that white people constitute a superior race and should therefore dominate society, typically to the exclusion or detriment of other racial and ethnic groups, in particular, black or Jewish people." (Attribution: Oxford English Lexicon)

PREFACE TO PROPOSED 2021 SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

The United Methodist Church, including its predecessor bodies, has a long and rich history of concern for social justice. Its members have often taken forthright positions on controversial issues involving Christian principles. In addition to carrying out acts of mercy, Methodism's founder, John Wesley, spoke out against the abuse of animals, the exploitation of poor people, and the treatment of human beings as chattel. Following in Wesley's footsteps, some early Methodists expressed their opposition to the slave trade, to smuggling, and to the cruel treatment of prisoners. Similarly, the United Brethren strongly condemned slavery.

In 1908, The Methodist Episcopal Church (North) was the first denomination to adopt a Social Creed, which called for "equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life." Within the next decade similar statements were adopted by The Methodist Episcopal Church (South) and by The Methodist Protestant Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church adopted a statement of Social Principles in 1946 at the time of the uniting of The United Brethren and The Evangelical Church. In 1972, four years after the uniting in 1968 of The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a new statement of Social Principles, which was revised in 1976 and by each successive General Conference. In 2008, the General Conference added a Social Creed companion litany.

The Social Principles are not church law. Instead, they represent the prayerful and earnest efforts of the General Conference to speak to issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation that is in keeping with the best of our United Methodist traditions. The Social Principles are thus a call to faithfulness and to social engagement and intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. Moreover, they challenge all members of The United Methodist Church to engage in deliberative reflection and encourage intentional dialogue between faith and practice. (See ¶ 509.)

The Social Principles are also a living document. In recognition of the important changes that have taken place in The United Methodist Church over the past 50 years, including significant developments in Africa, Europe and the Philippines, the 2012 General Conference mandated that the Social Principles be revised to increase their theological grounding, succinctness and global relevance. To accomplish this task, the General Board of Church and Society initially sought input and advice through consultations held in each of the five U.S. Jurisdictions and a majority of the Central Conferences. The initial draft of the revised Social Principles was developed by six writing teams, whose members reflected the broad diversity of the church. Following this, an Editorial Revision Team perfected additional drafts, based on feedback received via online surveys, extensive consultations with central and annual conferences, and comments solicited from United Methodist scholars, bishops, church bodies and leaders across the denomination.

SPECIAL EDITORIAL NOTES

Throughout the Social Principles, the term "we" refers specifically to the General Conference and more broadly to members of The United Methodist Church. Unless otherwise stated, the term "church" refers specifically to The United Methodist Church rather than, for example, the Church Universal.

PREAMBLE TO PROPOSED 2021 SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

We, the people called United Methodists, affirm our faith in the living God, who created everything that is and called it good, and created human beings in God's own image. We give thanks for Jesus Christ, incarnation of God's love and our Savior, who redeems and heals our relationship with God. We trust in the movements of the Holy Spirit, transforming human lives and the whole creation. Further, we declare our faith that God's grace is available to all and "nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created" (Rom. 8:38-39).

From the beginning, God called us into covenant, bound with God, with one another, and with God's wonderfully diverse creation. God called us, further, to live lovingly in those relationships and to be stewards of God's created world, to tend God's garden. As we do our part in caring for creation, we allow all other parts of creation to fulfill their distinctive roles in the covenantal relationship with God (Gen. 2:7-15). According to Jesus' commandment, we are to love one another: "Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other" (John 13:34-35).

Created in God's image to live in covenant with God and the world, we honor the dignity of all beings and affirm the goodness of life. Knowing that we are held in God's grace, we are able to confess our sins. We have failed to love God with our whole hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We have participated in unjust and life-destroying social systems. We have not been faithful stewards of God's creation, nor have we valued the role that every part of creation plays in the flourishing of God's world. Further, we have not followed Jesus Christ in sharing God's extravagant love and ministering with "the least of these" (Matt. 25:45) We have closed ourselves to God's guiding Spirit in our daily interactions with the human family and the earth. We have fallen short, and yet God loves us still.

We are grateful for God's forgiving and sanctifying love, given to us and to all and drawing us toward perfect love. By God's grace, we are called to be more Christ-like, and thus to be merciful, just and compassionate. Responding to that call, we seek to follow Jesus, who gave boundless love to all—the children, the outcast, the condemned and the confused. Jesus calls every generation to wholehearted discipleship: opening our hearts to the people we encounter daily; practicing compassion with our families and neighbors; honoring the dignity and worth of all people near and far; recognizing the systems that destroy human lives through poverty, war and exclusion; and advocating justice and care in our churches, communities and social structures. God calls us further to be stewards of creation, caring for the skies and waters, soil and plants, and all beings.

We give thanks for God's good gift of the Church Universal and for the Christian values embodied in the Wesleyan tradition and in The United Methodist Church. We recognize that the Body of Christ has many parts, and all are valuable. Thus, we respect differences within Christ's Body, including differences in understanding and expressing faith, in gifts and practices of ministry, and in life experiences, as shaped by ethnicities, cultures, communities, abilities, age, sexual orientation and gender. We affirm our belief in the inestimable worth of each individual to whom God gives unique gifts. We renew our commitment to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel in our daily lives and work and to magnify our witness as the church.

Differences are a precious gift and daunting challenge. They can stretch the church's capacity to live and minister faithfully. Yet God calls our church to difficult discipleship, with Jesus as our guide and the Spirit as our daily strength. With God's help, we accept the challenge to follow the high calling "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Mic. 6:8, NRSV) John Wesley's General Rules continue to inspire United Methodists to faithful practices that will do no harm, do good, and follow the ordinances of God.¹ We recognize the challenges before the church to engage with honesty and compassion through deep listening, hard conversations and shared ministry, even when we do not agree on all matters.

We acknowledge that the church is a living body gathered from the many and diverse parts of the human community. Thus, unanimity of beliefs, opinion, and practice have never been characteristic of the church from the beginning. From its earliest times, as witnessed in the Gospels, Paul's letters, the Acts of the Apostles, and other New Testament texts, diverse understandings and controversies on many matters have been the reality. Therefore, whenever significant differences of opinion occur among Christians, some of which continue to divide the church deeply today, faithful Christians need to face their disagreements and even their despair, and not cover differences with false claims of consensus or unanimity. On the contrary, the church needs to embrace conflicts with courage and perseverance as we seek together to discern God's will. With that understanding and commitment, we pledge ourselves to acknowledge and to embrace with courage, trust, and hope those controversies that arise among us, accepting them as evidence that God is not yet finished in sculpting us to be God's people.

Recognizing that God is our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, we seek to center our lives and witness on God. We are confident that nothing can separate us from the grace of God, and that the social witness of the church is a testimony to that grace. With God's help, we pledge to share ministry and honor everyone's dignity, even when we disagree, to seek the mind of Christ, and to follow God's will in all things.