

Encuentros de Gracia y Bienvenida

Diversity and Welcome in our Faith Communities
in the United Church of Christ



Racism Toolkit

Justice and Local Church Ministries
Health and Wholeness Advocacy



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Gracia y Bienvenida**
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and the Rev. Rhina Ramos



INTRODUCTION

Racism is a wound that affects everyone. Regardless of who is in power and who is oppressed, we all suffer the consequences of racism. The oppressor is never enriched from relationships based on equity and equality, and the oppressed lack the enjoyment of their human rights and basic dignity as long as they are subjects of said oppression. Oppressive systems cause extreme poverty both economically and spiritually. White supremacy and privilege are the most common ways in which we see racism upheld, which are subsequently maintained by the white Euro-centric of economic and political power. Racism is at the root of the discrimination that many non-white people experience in this society. God cries when God's children are rejected due to their race, skintone, or ethnicity.

The divine plan is for ALL to live an abundant life. All people should have the right to live authentically and enjoy equality and equity. As stewards of the earth, we are not called to dominate its resources or one another, but to care for, enjoy, and coexist with ALL of God's creation. Let's start talking now of how to overcome the sin of racism and inequality, and ensure that there is a revolutionary welcome for all who enter our churches.



To keep in mind when using this information:

The following testimonies are intended to spark conversation in our faith communities. We ask that you engage this material in love, humility, curiosity and respect.

Remember, the mission of the United Church of Christ states, "...we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all."

Love: In the way Jesus has loved us, we are called to love one another.

Humility: Realize we learn each day and throughout our lives. We don't know everything and that is the beauty of life; we can always learn if we are open and humble.

Curiosity: Actively engage with the material; ask questions in a sincere effort to learn from one another.

Respect: Seek to see the divine in these testimonies, to hold them as the truths for your siblings. Remember, they have opened themselves to share their painful and joyful experiences as "the other."

Read each testimony, and take time to understand their depth. After each reading take the time to pause, reflect, and learn.

Included at the end of these testimonies are reflection questions and an Intersectionality Bowling Activity. This activity was designed by Rev. Elivette Mendez Angulo to help us understand in a more engaged way how our identities are interconnected and how our wholeness is affected when some of those identities are neglected. We invite you to include this activity for a fun, insightful conclusion to your time together.



Tips for Facilitators

Materials

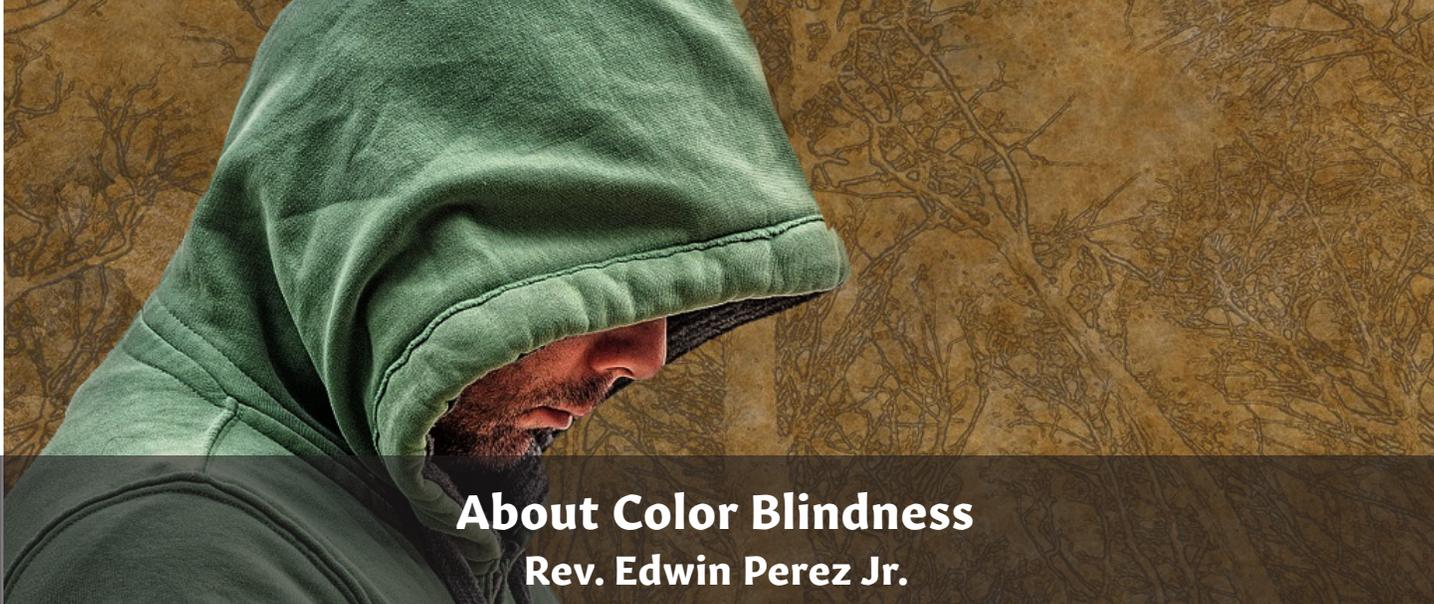
**Suggested Time
for discussion:**

90 minutes

- Easel paper
- Markers
- Sticky notes
- Pens
- If you want to show the video clip found in the reading "How to be an ally," you must have a projector and a computer.

- If your group is more than 10 people, you may want to break the group into smaller teams of 4-5 participants.





About Color Blindness

Rev. Edwin Perez Jr.

“The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.” Psalm 146:8 (NRSV)

It disconcerts me to hear, “Oh, I’m colorblind!” I believe this assertion to be deceptive, fraudulent, a cheap cop-out, although perhaps not intentionally, to assert that racism and ethnocentrism aren’t threats.

This assertion has been followed by quoted scriptures: “for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). This seems to imply that we shouldn’t focus on outward appearances, but instead consider what is on the inside of the person (like God does). Although I appreciate text’s idealism, I know and have experienced the horrific history that hangs on our necks and that has formed our narrative of coerced oppression by the “white cis-man.”

If God loves us all the same...if we have all been made in God’s image and likeness even in the midst of our differences...then why can’t we see each other?

I, as a Latino with European features, understand that although I am a “person of color” (ethnically), I am aware of the advantage I have of “passing” as a white male (racially). I remember being celebrated for being born whiter than the rest of my family. They alluded that whiter is prettier, even among different-hued Latinx folks. I remember hearing, “the kid is black but beautiful,” speaking of someone’s child and once more demonstrating the colonized indoctrination in our Latin American minds: that white is “superior.” Racism is not only internalized in white people, but has also been taught to us as people of color.

I may be a fair-skinned Latino, yet I will never abandon my entire identity. The rhythms of Bomba y Plena have formed parts of who I am; it’s my inheritance.



The Taíno and Afro-Caribbean cuisine has curbed my appetite and taste. I may look white, but I refuse to mark “white” on the U.S. census or any other application because my race isn’t worn obviously on my skin, but woven by my ancestry and into my ethnicity. Besides, when I speak certain words or when my last name is read aloud, stereotypes might begin to form in peoples minds. I am proud of who I am, just as God loves me, and with pride I will catapult myself into counteracting the systemic oppressions that persist among my people, especially with those who aren’t “passing.” I am aware and “woke,” and I will continue to see color, which will not be taken away from me.

I am here to stay, I will speak as much Spanish as I want, I will continue to dance my Salsa (well), my música jíbara, my merengue, and my bachata. I will NOT assimilate, but integrate as my full self! If there is not room, I will make room and form frontlines. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:18, NRSV), I will not bow to an idol—in this case, white supremacy. God spoke through the prophet Isaiah saying, “for my house shall be called, ‘a house of prayer for all people’” (Isaiah 56:7, NRSV). The words “all people” include all races and ethnicities. God does not desire assimilation or uniformity; God wants unity and diversity. That is what we were created for. I can’t change the world alone, but together, if we awaken, we can cleanse ourselves from racism and its long-term effects. It must start with identifying our own levels of privilege. So, are you still “colorblind”?



After reading this testimony, we suggest that the group facilitator lead the discussion of the topic as follows:

- Lead the group in a brief breathing exercise (inhaling and exhaling at least 3 times).
- Ask the participants to write down their initial thoughts and questions.

Then, have them discuss the following questions in groups of two or three:

- What comes to mind when someone says to you “I don’t see your color”?
- How can ignoring racism in our faith communities hurt us?
- Talk about a time when the pain of racism in our lives was erased or minimized.
- How are we combating racism in our congregation?
- What can our community do to extend an unconditional welcome?



Language Discrimination

Rev. Lizette Merchán Padilla

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Acts 2:4 (NIV)

I moved to the U.S. in 2001 from Colombia because I fell in love. I learned English at school back home, as my parents understood learning a second language was a matter of worldly need. I only started to speak it as my life was unraveling in the country of my beloved. The world of love lived out—out of need to insert oneself in a brand-new context.

I don't remember exactly at what age I learned to read. I do remember asking my mom going over our local Spanish newspaper to please let me know when I knew how to read. The innocence of a child's realm.

Then I grew up and moved two continents away where I joined our home church and served as a member first, then as a volunteer, evolving from a seminarian student to finally an ordained minister of the Word—the word that speaks in many contexts and languages of “the wonders of God” (Acts 2:11).

I have worked in both English and Spanish, and have learned that speaking Spanish is not as popular or trendy as French, Italian, or Portuguese. That Spanish can be offensive to be spoken in public. That speaking Spanish labels one as a “certain kind” where the labeler decides where I belong or should belong. Adding onto Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's words, I should be able to live bilingually ‘in a nation where [we] will not be judged by the color of our skin, [or the accent that we speak] but by the content of [our] character.”



In figuring out how to be filled with the Holy Spirit—with my native tongue Spanish and my adoptive English—I am navigating the waters of uncertainty for having an accent, for not sounding like one usually would sound in one’s native language, and for appropriating one’s fullness of the Holy Spirit in a second foreign tongue. All this plus trying to not lose one’s own identity to fit in in a foreign language. I have become an interpreter of sorts of the wonders of God in my very own multifaceted ministry: from immigration hurdles, to reclaiming my bilingual accented voice, to working my way through English in living it out like I live it out in the way I am fully in Spanish.

The presence of the Holy Spirit—the risen Messiah in the community’s life is indicated first of all by the miracle of speaking in unknown foreign languages. I have been transformed from a foreigner, to the speaker of the Word, to belonging to the risen one who is poured out in us as teacher and comforter of disciples in the creator’s absence.



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- ☉ Lead the group in a brief breathing exercise (inhaling and exhaling at least 3 times).
- ☉ Ask the participants to write down their initial thoughts and questions.

Then, have them discuss the following questions in groups of two or three:

- ☉ How can language be used as a tool to discriminate against others?
- ☉ Why are other European languages are considered better than Spanish?
- ☉ How are we combating racism in our congregation?
- ☉ How can we extend an unconditional welcome to everyone?



How can you become an ally against racism? Rev. Rhina Ramos

Often the term “cultural humility” is used when learning about another’s person cultural heritage. This concept means understanding that we are not experts of another person’s cultural worldview. Only the person whose life has been shaped by the particular culture can speak about their experience. Also, cultural humility is understanding that the process for learning about our own privilege is going to take a lifetime and we are willing to make mistakes, acknowledge responsibility, and keep on learning. It is the letting go of our desire to belong, and to allowing for the invitation to be a witness of someone else’s journey. This diversity trainer explains the concept in great detail: [Cultural Humility Ted Talk by Dr. Juliana Mosley](#).

White supremacy has eroded the potential for humility of any kind. Another important step in establishing trust in multicultural settings is the acknowledgement of white privilege.

White privilege is not earned or gained by one’s merits, but granted simply for being born white in this society. White privilege does not have to be an eternal mea culpa, nor does it need to be the barrier to receive new lessons from non-white people. However, it does need to precede the engagement so that the humanity of those with less economic and political power doesn’t become immediately invisible. White privilege tends to distort the perspective of those who carry it inattentively, because it establishes the worldview of whites as the norm.



Kate Schatz writes a wonderful piece on white allyship in the book *Radical Hope*. In her words, “Nothing changes if we just feel shitty about being white. And nothing changes if we refuse to talk about it. The opposite of white pride does not have to be white shame.”



“Dear good white people (you know who you are), I have a secret to tell you: There is no such thing. There are only white people who work to do good, just things. You are an ally because of your actions, not because you say you are. You’re an ally when you call out racist comments, when you listen and learn, when you work in solidarity with people of color to dismantle institutional racism, when your efforts and actions are felt by others.” It is in this way we are living out Jesus’ gospel “by this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).



After reading this testimony, we suggest that the group facilitator lead the discussion of the topic as follows:

- ☉ Lead the group in a brief breathing exercise (inhaling and exhaling at least 3 times).
- ☉ Ask the participants to write down their initial thoughts and questions.

Then, have them discuss the following questions in groups of two or three:

- ☉ What does it mean to acknowledge our own privilege?
- ☉ What tools can help us become allies?



Intersectional Bowling Activity

Rev. Elivette Mendez Angulo

This activity is designed to spark authentic conversations and engagements around diversity within our sacred spaces.

Please be aware that this is a 45-minute activity on a topic so complex and deep that trainings on this topic alone can—and do—span entire weekends, weeks, and more. Be mindful of feelings that come up in the group, and if needed, gently steer the conversation back to how these issues may affect how we “do welcome.”

Goals:

- 🌀 Increase participants’ awareness of diversity and intersectionality.
- 🌀 Understand one’s own privilege.
- 🌀 Identify some of the ways in which exclusion of one part of an individual affects other parts of who they are and who we are.

Duration:

Approx. 45 minutes. If you have a large group (more than 10 people), select 4-5 volunteers to show the activity and then discuss the activity with the large group.



Accessibility Considerations:

If someone isn’t able to roll the ball, ask someone else in the group to be their designated roller.



Materials:

- Permanent marker
- Small to medium-sized portable bowling set: 10 pins and 1 or 2 plastic bowling balls.

Instructions:

1. Mark each of the 10 bowling pins in marker with the following:

- Race & Ethnicity
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion
- Gender Identity & Expression
- Economic Class
- Ability (physical, emotional, mental)
- Language
- Age
- Immigration status (which will depend on the context)
- Other (any identity not listed)



2. Mark the balls as:

- Exclusion from Grace
- Lack of Welcome

3. Let participants know that the full set of pins is “All of Who You Are”!

4. Prepare the space for a lively bowling match. Set the bowling pins up in four rows as seen above.

5. Have each player take turns knocking down the pins.

6. Analyze the exercise:

- What are your identities?
- What happens when a ball knocks down one of those identities?
- What does this have to do with diversity?
- What does this have to do with feeling welcome?

QUESTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

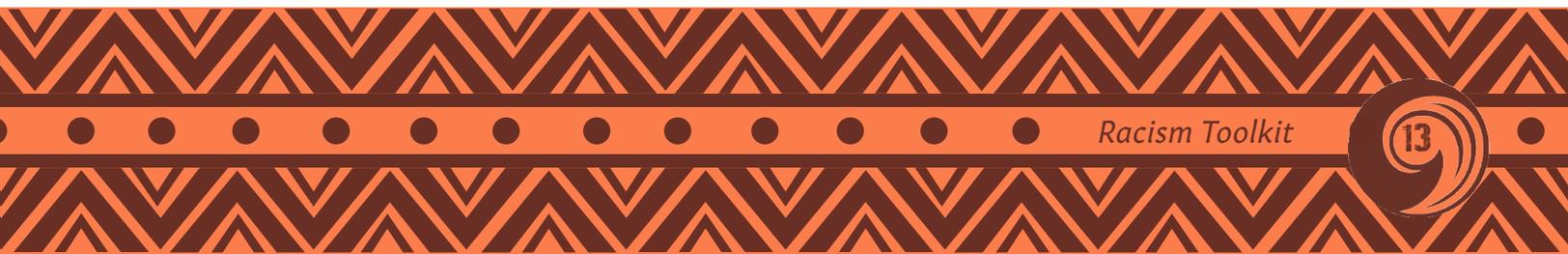
The journal area is designed to be a place where you can reflect and write down your thoughts.



A large area of lined paper for writing, featuring a vertical red margin line on the left and horizontal blue lines. The left edge of the page has a series of black dots, suggesting it is a spiral-bound notebook.



A large writing area consisting of 25 horizontal blue lines. A vertical red line is positioned on the left side, approximately one-fifth of the way across the page. On the far left edge, there is a vertical column of 25 black dots, one corresponding to each horizontal line.



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