Join the Movement All-Church Read

***How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi**

COP Facilitator’s Guide Adapted with permission and gratitude

Thank you for joining us on this journey toward becoming an antiracist church and building an antiracist world. The United Church of Christ has a long history of addressing and advocating for an end to racist policies and practices, including systemic and institutional racism within the Christian church. We are grateful you are taking this opportunity to lean into understanding and dismantling racism based on biology, ethnicity, body, culture, behavior, color, space and class, as you equip yourselves for the intersectional struggle for racial justice that addresses overlapping networks of oppression and bigotry.

“'Racist' and 'antiracist' are like peelable name tags that are placed and replaced based on what someone is doing or not doing, supporting, or expressing in each moment. These are not permanent tattoos. No one becomes a racist or antiracist. We can only strive to be one or the other. We can unknowingly strive to be a racist. We can knowingly strive to be an antiracist… being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination."

In this Facilitator’s Guide, you will find:

* A sample outline for how you could structure your discussion sessions;
* Guidance for creating group covenants to foster brave space for conversation;
* Tips for facilitating generous, rooted, prophetic, and truthful sacred discussions.

# Sample Outline for Discussion Groups

Preparation:

Invite participants to read whatever chapter(s) you will be discussion. Ask folks to spend time digesting, taking notes, and praying with each chapter. You can also encourage folks to journal about their responses and questions each day as well. Set aside 60-90 minutes as part of your regular COP meeting for shared discussion. *NB: This discussion group would also easily be adapted to Zoom or other online group forums.*

Materials Needed:

Candle(s) and/or pitcher of water and a bowl; journals [optional]; paper and writing implements [optional]

Set Up:

Set up chairs in a circle or around a table with the candle(s) at the center. If you are using them, place journals or paper and writing implements at each seat.

Session Outline:

Times provided are for a 60-90 minute discussion within a COP meeting.

Simply extend or reduce discussion time if you are hoping for a shorter or longer session.

* Centering Time (5 minutes)

As we engage in conversations around difficult topics, it is helpful to remind ourselves that these discussions are holy ground and that we are entering a sacred journey, connected to God and to each other as beloved ones of the Holy One. At the same time, one of the most important capacities we can grow as part of our antiracism practices is the ability to center (and recenter) ourselves. Practicing grounding ourselves in breath, prayer, and intentions helps us develop the ability to return to that centered place when we experience distress or harm. It also helps us to reconnect to the “why” of our practice, to what keeps us coming back, even when things are

difficult or overwhelming. So, begin your time together with grounding, symbolic action, and prayer.

* + Once folks have gathered, invite everyone to take some deep breaths and ground themselves in their intentions for this place and time.
	+ Light your candle(s) as a reminder of God’s presence in and among us as we gather. If using, take a moment to pour water into the bowl and invite participants to remember the baptismal promise in which we all share: that we are all, uniquely and equally, beloved children of God, welcomed, loved, cherished, and valued in this space and every space.
	+ Offer the prayer provided in the discussion guide, or another of your choosing.
* Covenant (5 minutes\*) – How does your covenant help you engage in the topic of anti-racism? Are there specific changes or additions to your COP group covenant that need to be included for this topic?

Attending to the “how” of your gathering and fostering accountability are both important antiracist practices. Take a moment at the beginning of your time together to re-read your covenants and invite a moment of check-in about how you are doing at keeping them and if any more should be added.

* Check In (5-10 minutes – depending on how many people you have)

Offering a time for participants to check in helps build community and foster relationships which is part of practicing antiracism. As Audre Lorde reminds us, “Without community, there is no

liberation.”

* + Invite participants to respond briefly (in a sentence or two) to one of the following check-in prompts:
		- Where is one place/what is one moment in which you caught a glimpse of a future of justice for all?
		- What’s something you are grateful for or lamenting today?
		- What challenges and/or joys are you experiencing in your life?
* Discussion (40 minutes)
	+ Choose one of the questions in the discussion guide to focus on for a while. Then follow with another one or two. Expect to only have time to engage 1-2 (maybe 3) questions in a 60-minute session.
	+ [Optional – To cater to different learning styles and personalities or foster a more contemplative atmosphere, invite participants to use their paper and writing

implements to do a free write for about 2 minutes in response to the question. Then move into a verbal discussion.]

* + [Optional – If your group is large or if you have a lot of internal processors/introverts, have folks turn to a neighbor to share their thoughts initially in pairs or trios, and then bring some of what they talked about to the larger group]
* Intention Setting (3 minutes)

Practicing antiracism means challenging and changing the ways we live and move through the world. And making those kinds of changes becomes more possible if we set intentions that we can be accountable to.

* + Invite participants to use their journals, or paper and writing implements to respond to one of the following prompts:
		- What intentions are you setting for your antiracist practice this week?
		- How do you want to demonstrate your commitment to racial justice this week?
* Deeper check in – as we have focused on anti-racism, how do you see this work reflected in your ministry? (45 minutes)
	+ And/or is there something of urgency that you need to name?
* Shared prayers – invite group to lift up the prayer concerns that they are holding. (10 minutes)
* Closing Blessing (2 minutes)
	+ Engage the group in one of the following sending practices:
		- Invite each person to share one word of how they are feeling or what they are taking with them from the discussion today.
		- Invite each person to share one word of gratitude for this time together.
		- While standing in a circle, invite participants to place their right hand on their own heart, and their left hand on the back of the person next to them (having asked their permission). Take some deep breaths together and invite folks to notice the connections between their beating hearts.
		- Choose one of the [embodiment exercises from Capacitar](https://playandpray.net/capacitar/) to engage the group in. The Shower of Light is a particularly good one to end with.
		- Use one of Cole Arthur Riley’s breath prayers from the [Black Liturgies](https://www.instagram.com/blackliturgies/) project to conclude your time together.

GROUP COVENANTS (How does your group covenant reflect these values?)

In order for conversations to be courageous and for us to strive to “do no harm” in our discussions of race, it is important to create a container that can hold them. In the UCC, we are a people of covenants, meaning we seek to make and hold promises with one another, guided and held by the Holy One, that help us grow, change and flourish as God’s beloved ones. So, before you delve into discussions of *How to Be An Antiracist*, take some time to discuss why you are here and how you want to be in conversation with each other. Give each person a chance to give voice to their hopes for this time and their personal goals for how they want to show up. Then make some collective agreements to help you foster [a brave space](https://rhfoerger.wordpress.com/2021/09/17/invitation-to-brave-space/) for your conversations. Remember, the goal is to practice antiracism, that is, to create greater equity in and through your conversations, not to be comfortable, unchallenged, respectable, or sheltered. Below, you’ll find some that we recommend. Once you’ve discussed these covenants, offer a sign to each other that you will hold them, with the help of God.

Accountability is a key antiracist practice, so use the covenants to help get conversations back on track or address moments of slippage. Don’t forget to check in with each other periodically throughout your time together to see how you are doing at keeping your covenants. Creating accountability together is not about policing others’ expressions, but rather, it is about empowering the group to address harm when it happens and return to the love and justice that is at the heart of your desire to practice antiracism.

We agree/covenant to:

* + Use “I” statements

locate your reflections within your own experience and avoid speaking for others

* + Speak truths

be as forthcoming as you can with your own understandings, thoughts and feelings

* + Embrace differences and complexities

recognize that the person/people you are in conversation with are bringing their own perspective, shaped by their own experiences; work toward understanding rather than agreement

* + Lean in with curiosity

stay openhearted, ask questions to deepen understanding, resist withdrawing or shaming



* + Expect discomfort

build in moments for deep breathing, pauses to reflect and recenter, and moments to be aware of your mindbodyspirit

* + Address impacts

no matter what the intent, harm happens; hold space to understand impacts and repair harm; be accountable for harmful impacts

* + Respect confidentiality

decide between conversation partners if and how anything that is said may be shared with others

* + Foster reciprocity

listen actively when you are not speaking, work toward equity of voices, be aware of the

space you are taking or if you’re withdrawing to or staying comfortable in silence

* + Practice self-care

only you know how you are able to engage in conversations like these in any give moment; share what you are able, sustain your heart, go as deep as you can but no deeper, nurture your own well-being

# Facilitator Tips

Movement facilitator adrienne maree brown describes facilitation as both holding space and holding change. She reminds us that the word facilitate comes from the Latin root *facilis,* which means to make easy. She says, “To hold change or hold space is to hold both the people in and the dynamic energy of a room, a space, a discussion, etc…To hold change is to make it easy for people with shared intentions to be around each other and move towards their vision and values...Facilitation is making it as easy as possible for groups of people to do the hard work of dreaming, learning, visioning, and acting together” (*Holding Change: The Way of Emergent Strategy Facilitation and Mediation,* 7).

While you won’t be able to make people comfortable or promise safety, as a discussion facilitator, you have the opportunity to cultivate a shared space geared toward each person’s flourishing, toward deep connection and toward transformative learning. It is a sacred calling and a blessing in community, but it is not without its challenges and

pitfalls. So here are some tips and reminders for facilitating antiracist, life-giving, and transformational discussions.

* Encourage a space of curiosity over critique; foster an environment of appreciative inquiry.

It is easy for groups to get caught in a posture of critique, focusing on where they think the author is wrong or what they disagree with. This often prevents engagement with the core ideas the author is offering and can serve as a distraction from the deeper work the book is encouraging. Invite people to find a balance between critique and generosity and to focus on what they are noticing and learning, rather than nitpicking how they might differ.

* Hold space for complexity/ambiguity.

Each person brings a variety of experiences, ideas and values to the room. The goal of discussion is not necessarily to agree but to come to understand one another. Remind people that there is space for multiple truths. Encourage people to entertain the idea that there can be difference without disaster!

* Help people be mindful of universalizing their experiences.

Even if the people in your group share many identity markers and similar life experiences – and especially if they don’t – there will be a diversity of knowledge, skills and understandings in the room. These differences are part of the richness of learning together. But it is often tempting for folks to assume that everyone shares their experience and understanding. As a facilitator, you can remind people that their experience is just that, theirs, and may not be shared by others. See “Use ‘I’ statements” in the covenant above.

* Introduce pauses and opportunities for self-regulation.

Moments of conflict or intense emotions may arise during your conversations. You will be talking about ideas and experiences that are filled with fraught emotions for many. Don’t be afraid to invite folks to slow down and take a breath if things get tense or if folks seem to be getting left behind by the conversation. Even if you’ve just reached a pause in a conversation, take the opportunity to recenter. This capacity to reground yourself is an important antiracist practice.

* Watch for imbalances and be invitational.

All of us have been formed by white supremacy in practices of dominance and myths of superiority. Your discussions may have moments that fall into typical patterns of power that privilege certain voices or styles of interaction. Pay attention to who is speaking and who isn’t, who is taking up a lot of space and who is not taking enough. Do your best to keep

creating openings for people to engage, using prompts like, “Would anyone who hasn’t spoken yet or in a while like to speak?” or “Let’s take a pause to hear from someone new.” Keep in mind that folks may have reasons for not engaging that they may not be able to articulate, so try to make sure folks can take a pass if they need to.

* Get comfortable with the unfinished.

The work of racial justice is the work of generations. Becoming antiracist is the journey of a lifetime. You won’t solve racism or learn everything there is to know about it in one discussion session or through one book discussion. Remind folks that urgency is a strategy of white supremacy and that being on-the-way is what we are called to as followers of the revolutionary Jesus. Discussions might not end wrapped up in a pretty bow and that’s ok.

Keep people leaning into the ongoing nature of this work.

* Address harm when it happens; attend to impact over intent.

If someone says or does something harmful in the process of your discussion, take the time to address it. If at all possible, it is often helpful to call people in with the whole group present, though sometimes it may make sense to do so individually in a follow-up conversation.

However you decide to approach it, try to make sure that there is opportunity to bring attention to harmful words or behavior, including bias, prejudice, microaggressions, and discrimination. Be especially attentive to the tendency of people of European decent to engage in cathartic confession, often discussing heinous racist things they have done or witnessed, being mindful that these kinds of stories may impact others in the group in harmful ways. When calling in, the goal is not to shame or demean someone, but rather, to invite them into deeper relationship by creating accountability. While folks will often insist that they “didn’t mean to” do harm, and will try to focus on what they were intending to say, remember that practicing antiracism means attending to the impact of what we do and say, regardless of what our intent might have been.

* Resist the tendency to be, or be seen as, the expert or arbiter of the space. *Facilitation is not about centering yourself; it’s about centering the work. As a facilitator your role is not to have all the answers or control the space, but rather to help encourage transformative conversations. You are there to enable and empower the learning and discovery of the participants. Folks may want to turn you into the authority on all things antiracist, but you can help remind them that each person has contributions to make to our understanding and growth as a group and each person has responsibility for keeping the group accountable to its best intentions, practices and values.*
* Diffuse or de-escalate defensiveness.

One of the ways that discomfort and/or shame can manifest itself in conversations involving race or racism is as defensiveness. This may be embodied in lots of different ways, including getting angry and loud or retreating to silence. However it is displayed, the result is often a wall built between that person and others, or between self-protection and growth/learning. Try to de-escalate defensiveness by inviting people to take a breath or notice/write down what they are feeling (see Introduce pauses and opportunities for self-regulation above).

Invite people to lean in with curiosity and resist withdrawing in those moments or to take the time they need to self-regulate, but return to the group so that the learning and connection can continue.

* Encourage accountability and self-compassion.

It is important to foster accountability in our communities (see Address harm… above). Accountability is owning our mistakes or moments where we cause hurt or harm, or moments when we act out of alignment with our values and working toward repair and effective change. True accountability encourages us to grow. But too often, accountability elicits shame. Remember, shame really gets us nowhere. Wallowing in shame or guilt or sadness or despair actually keeps the focus on that individual, rather than the realities of racism or the harm it causes. So as a facilitator, you have the opportunity to help the group develop practices of accountability AND to move away from being numbed or overwrought by shame and guilt. Invite people to make a connection to their heart by rubbing where their heart is on their chest as they offer themselves self-compassion and remember that they are a beloved child of God, even when they mess up. We all need to be reminded of grace as we stive to do better.

