OPENING PRAYER

God, we come to today’s conversation knowing that we are all coming from different pasts, different experiences, and different pre-conceived notions. Help us to not assume that our experience is best, that we know more, or that we have the answers. Help us to be open to hear the stories—of both challenge and ease—from others’ lived experience. As we enter this space of intentional vulnerability and conversation, help us to turn off divisive language and media sources that have impacted our ability to deeply listen to one another. Help us listen for understanding, not for being correct. We know that conversations about race are not easy and we know that the barriers society has created only make this work more difficult. Let us be open to learning, to listening, and to growing together. Help us to be patient with one another as we attempt to grow and express ourselves. Help us to become aware of the deep hurt, pain, and challenges that others have experienced, and accept that becoming aware of accepting their stories of struggle does not diminish our lived experience. Help us embrace the vision you have for us to build each other up and to grow into your beloved community.

God help us breath…Help me breath… In and out… In and out… Help me be grateful for this opportunity to talk about race. Help me be present, willing, and engaged during this session. God, remind us to breathe. Amen.

INDIVIDUAL WARM-UP

Take time to reflect on how race has impacted your life and how race is experienced in your community. Here are some guiding questions for your reflection:

1. What is my race? How old was I when I learned what race I am?
2. Where do I see, hear, and experience positive information and examples of my race (e.g., news, magazines, children’s toys, who holds positions of power)?
   a. How often do I see people of a different race in those same places?
3. When I consider engaging with people of another race other than my own, what is my first gut feeling?

GROUP WARM-UP

Together review the RESPECTful Guidelines and Mutual Invitation process and recommit to your small group covenant.

Discuss the following questions or prompts:

1. Share with what race you identify and what that identification means to you.
2. How is race talked about or not talked about in our community? Why?
3. Brainstorm, as many ways as possible, the benefits of learning from, experiencing, and hearing stories of accomplishment and trials from people of other races than your own.
GROUNDED IN SCRIPTURE

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” — Galatians 3:28 (ESV)

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.” — Romans 10:12 (ESV)

“There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality” — Romans 2:11 (NRSV)

“But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” — James 2:9 (ESV)

“May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” — Romans 15:5-6 (NRSV)

DISCUSS AS A GROUP

What are examples of diversity given in these scriptures?

What do these scriptures teach about and call us to do around diversity in God’s creation?

WHAT DOES THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAY?

“We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened. We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to housing, education, communication, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection. We deplore acts of hate or violence against groups or persons based on race, color, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, status, economic condition, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious affiliation.” — 2016 Book of Discipline, ¶162, p. 119

“Therefore, be it resolved, that every annual conference, district, and local congregation within the United States develop and implement a strategy and program to educate and support systemic and personal changes to end racism and work multi-culturally...” — 2016 Book of Resolutions, ¶3374, p. 356

DISCUSS AS A GROUP

What stands out to you from our UMC doctrine?
PRAY TOGETHER...

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

Amen.


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RACE

This session’s video will feature the stories and testimonies of Pastors Karen Cook and Barb Sholis and Andres DeArco whose lives have been deeply impacted by race.

IN THIS SESSION YOU WILL HEAR HOW...

Change can be exciting. Change can be difficult.
My younger self did not know at the time that we couldn't stop just anywhere!
A friendship began to blossom.
Tanya demonstrated what courage is and what trust feels like. My granddaddy was wrong.
If they tell you to get down...get down. It’s important to make it home.
In the faces of those who resembled me—not Jimmy—I saw the same fear on my grandfather’s face...I saw hatred.
Conversation with our son... driving while black...
Friends, we can do better. We MUST do BETTER.
We are children of God...and sisters in Christ.
There was a critical truth to my experience- exclusion would be deeply tied to everything that I did.
For Jesus, love was demanded to be at the center of everything. Separation then becomes the antithesis of that love.
Church is a community that extends far beyond Sunday mornings.
What are we willing to let go of... what barriers must we let go of... to let love stand in the center of who we are and what we do.
We cannot expect the church to transform if we ourselves are not willing to being transformed.
AFTER WATCHING THE VIDEO, DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. How has race affected your life and what has been its impact on how you view faith, other people, and the world?

2. God instructs us to not fear and calls all of us beloved children of God, yet often prejudices around race—wanted or unwanted—position us to fear “the other”. As Christians, how does God call us to be in relationship with those whom we fear and those who are different from us?

3. What could a diverse church community look, sound, and feel like? Who would be the church, what would they do, and for what would they be known in their community?
| **PRAY** | Pray for the human race. Pray for those affected by human-developed divides around color of skin, language, location, and culture. Pray for God to reveal ways that you can be inspired toward action in building relationships with diverse persons and communities. |
| **SERVE** | Serve your community by providing “Acts of Repentance” opportunities as well as offering pastoral care, mental health services, education, collaboration, and safe space. |
| **PARTNER** | Partner with United Methodist resources: The United Methodist General Commission on Religion and Race: [http://www.gcorr.org/](http://www.gcorr.org/) The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society: [https://www.umcjustice.org/](https://www.umcjustice.org/) The United Methodist General Board of Higher Education for racial and ethnic based scholarship opportunities: [https://www.gbhem.org/loans-and-scholarships/scholarships/list-scholarships/racial-ethnic-specific-scholarships](https://www.gbhem.org/loans-and-scholarships/scholarships/list-scholarships/racial-ethnic-specific-scholarships) |
| **CONNECT** | Organize and participate in a Circles of Grace conversation about race with your church and community: [https://www.westohioumc.org/conference/circles-grace](https://www.westohioumc.org/conference/circles-grace) |