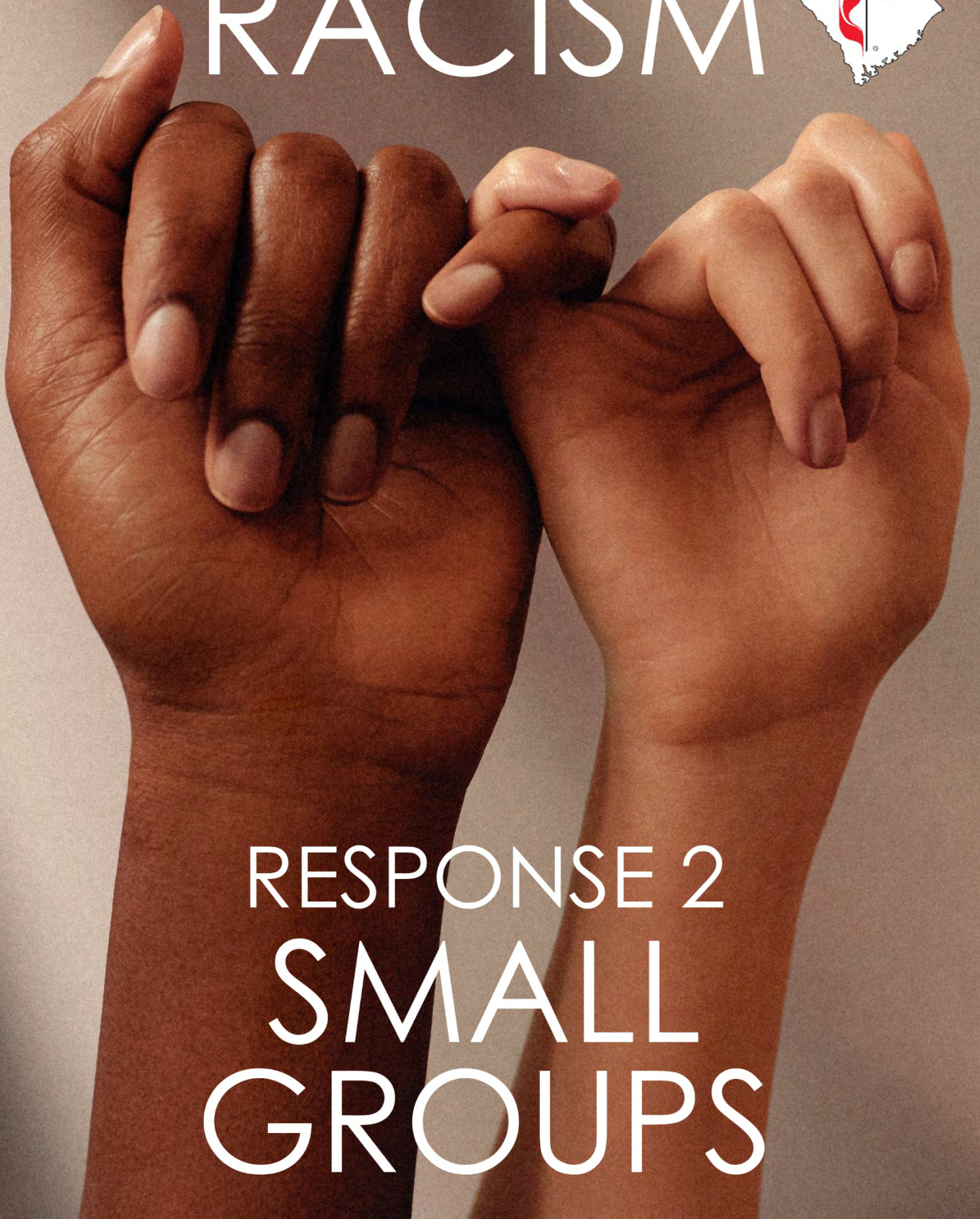


OUR RESPONSE TO RACISM



RESPONSE 2
SMALL
GROUPS

Response 2 – Small Groups

Introduction to the Small-Group Process

Racism is a cancer that ravages our society. It takes many forms – some overt, some covert and some systemic. It affects all of us in one way or another. Many of us have been victims of racism by way of open acts of hatred (sometimes violent), by systems that discriminate and refuse access to needed services, by cultural attitudes that diminish self-esteem or self-worth, and by events that cause emotional and physical harm.

While a small-group process is not an end-all to eliminating racism, it is a way to build bridges and to call groups to action that will help them grow personally and take action together to make a difference. The purpose of this small-group process is to get to know people from different ethnic groups, listen to each other's stories, and work toward tangible things we can do together to combat racism. A long-term resource for starting groups will be created, but for the groups to be successful, they will have to be self-directed. There is no timetable for completion of this small-group process. Take it at a pace that best fits your group.

Ideally, these small groups would be diverse, representing as broad a representation of ethnic backgrounds as possible. The number of participants can vary, but it would be best to keep it to a manageable level.

How can we eliminate racism? By taking one step at a time, by getting to know each other and each other's stories, by having conversations that lead to understanding, and then by working together to take relevant, meaningful action to make a difference.

This resource is designed to do just that. It is separated into seasons. Each season builds on the previous. We use the word "season" because the idea is to take your time and move through at your own pace. A season may be one gathering or multiple gatherings. The small group sets the pace.

(Please adhere to [COVID-19 best practices](#) to keep everyone safe.)

Season 1

A time of introduction, during which we hope to build trust by getting to know each other and by hearing each other's stories. We recognize that trust is built by common experiences, listening to each other with empathetic ears and sharing each other's pain and joy. It is recommended that the groups have a "living-room conversation" style. Meet in each other's homes. Maybe even share a meal or snack together.

Season 2

Sharing historical information about landmarks of racism throughout our history that shape our past and current reality. History, our story, affects who we are and how we live – especially how we relate to each other.

Season 3

Discovering our unconscious biases. We all have biases. Some lead to self-protection, while others can lead to self-harm and hurting others. Some of our biases are known and some are unknown. We want to uncover some of our unknown biases and have conversations about how they affect the way we do things and how we relate to people. Knowledge is power, and awareness of our biases is life-giving when we take action to change them.

Season 4

Storytelling to help us learn. We will watch relevant videos, read insightful articles and books, and talk about what we learned. Stories are cathartic, but conversations build bridges of understanding. Read and discuss several books, films, documentaries or articles during this season. Take on issues that are difficult to discuss, and live with each other's confusion, pain and discomfort. This season is at the heart of the matter.

Season 5

A call to action. As the groups finish the process, it is vital that this not be only a conversation but a call to take steps to combat and eliminate racism. Talk is cheap, but the intended outcome of this resource is action that makes a difference. Individual growth and growth as a group are goals, but doing something tangible together can change the world. You might, during this season, decide to continue to meet and take action beyond this process. We hope that you will have new Christian brothers and sisters and lifelong friends. But – more than anything else – we are hoping for action that addresses racism within ourselves, within our groups, and within our social settings.

The prayer of the team that designed this process is that God will bless you in the journey and guide you toward God's promised kingdom.

CEUs will be offered to pastors who participate in these groups in the same way residency groups are treated.

Season 1

A Time of Introduction

We recognize that trust is built by common experiences, listening to each other with empathetic ears and sharing each other's pain and joy. Season 1 is a time of introduction, during which we hope to build trust by getting to know each other and by hearing each other's stories. It is recommended that the groups have a "living-room conversation" style. Meet in each other's homes. Maybe even share a meal or snack together. ([COVID-19 best practices](#))

To the leader

As leader of the group, you are facilitator and participant. While you might be giving instruction and asking questions, you should share your thoughts, opinions and ideas.

Introductions

In this section, the group is formed and members are beginning to grow closer. Getting to know each other and building relationships leads to trust. Take your time and don't rush this. It is the foundation of the process. As facilitator, you might have to take the lead in sharing information about yourself. Leading makes it easier for people to share and gives them time to gather their thoughts.

Ask members to introduce themselves with this information:

- Name
- Family (spouse, children, grandchildren, etc.)
- Profession (for pastors, where do you serve and how long.)
- General information about yourself

Team-Building Icebreakers

Use as many icebreakers as you feel necessary to enhance the group process.

Name That Feeling

- Think of a time when you felt different from everyone else. Example: You were the only woman in a meeting.
- Identify one word that best describes how you felt at that time. Examples: "I was the only Hispanic person in the meeting. I felt *strange*." "I was the only person speaking sign language in the group. I felt *isolated*."
- Introduce yourself to the persons seated around you using the same word. Example: "I am strange." "I am isolated." Ask them to introduce themselves doing the same.

- Reflect on the following questions with those at your table:
 - What did you feel that made you describe yourself as “strange,” “isolated” or whatever word you chose?
 - What were some of the words most used during the introduction of each other?
 - Were there more positive or negative words?
 - What could be some of the implications of the positive words for our work?
 - What could be some of the implications of the negative words for our work?

Even when we all have felt different at one time or another, it's easy to forget the feelings associated with it. We may unintentionally exclude others or behave in ways that send mixed messages. If we can remember our own feelings about being different, it may help us to be more sensitive to others.

Source: [UMC General Commission on Religion and Race](#)

Things We Have In Common

- Break into groups of three or more.
- Within each group, identify what you have in common that cannot be seen.
- Each group has two minutes to come up with as many things as they can.
- Have each group share their lists with the overall group.
- Do this for two or three rounds, changing up the groups each time.
- Debrief and reflection questions:
 - “What was one thing you had in common with someone that surprised you?”
 - Ask the groups to share what they believe is a unique or interesting commonality.

Source: [The Balance Careers](#)

Cultural Scavenger Hunt

- Distribute “[Cultural Scavenger Hunt Checklist](#)” to each person. Add or delete items from the list to fit your group’s context. ([COVID-19 best practices](#))
- Have the group find people who fit each description on the list.
- When a person fits a particular description, ask them to initial your sheet.
- Anyone can initial another person’s sheet only once.
- Debrief and reflection questions:
 - What did you think about this exercise?
 - Did it make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?
 - Did you have preconceived thoughts that were confirmed or debunked?
 - Did you learn something new about someone?

Source: North Carolina New Teacher Support Program

Covenant

It is helpful to understand the ground rules before getting too deep into the conversation.

- What is said here stays here. The only person who can share what was said in the group is the person who said it.
- Use “I” statements, not generalizations, when having a discussion. When we say “you,” it often makes people defensive. When we use “they,” it indicates we don’t own what we are saying. “I” is personal and means we own what we say.
- Practice active listening. Instead of preparing your response, listen and be prepared to say back to the person what they were saying to you before formulating your response. Active listening is caring.
- Understand that, ultimately, real sharing comes from building trust within the group. Members must listen before criticizing, try to understand before condemning, and appreciate the person as God’s child.

Purpose

- To get to know people from different ethnic groups, listen to each other’s stories, and work toward tangible things they can do together to combat racism.
- Action makes the experience meaningful. No action means we wasted our time.

Initial Sharing Experience

- The journey begins with this simple experience. Hopefully, members will not feel threatening and lines of communication will be opened.
- What was the first time you recognized racial difference? Tell us about it.

Season 2

Gaining a historical perspective on racism

History, our story, affects who we are and how we live especially how we relate to each other.

Season 2 is about sharing historical information about landmarks of racism throughout our history that shapes our past and current reality.

To the leader

[Response 1 \(District Clergy Meetings\)](#) and the [“History of Racism” PowerPoint presentation](#) can be used as a starting point for your conversation on the history of racism. These resources can help you prepare what you want to say to your small group or as a refresher of the original training.

Following the history refresher, use these questions to facilitate a conversation:

- What is your reaction to the history presentation?
- What events in history have shaped our racial issues today?
- Have you experienced any of the events mentioned? What? How?
- How does that make you feel?
- What have you learned from the history presentation?

Season 3

Uncovering personal biases, stereotypes, prejudices

We all have biases. Some lead to self-protection and some to harm of self and others. Some of our biases are known and some are unknown. The intent of Season 3 is to uncover some of our unknown biases and to have conversations about how that affects how we act and relate to people. Knowledge is power – the knowledge of our biases is life giving when we take action to change them.

Harvard University’s “Project Implicit” has developed a video-game-like test anyone can take online to measure their implicit bias. To prepare for this season, have group members take the [“Social Attitudes Test”](#) on race before you gather for Season 3.

During this session, begin the group conversation with these questions:

- What biases did you discover?
- Were you surprised about your biases? How?
- How have your personal biases, stereotypes and prejudices been affected by this experience?

Season 4

Storytelling to help us learn

Season 4 is about viewing relevant videos, reading insightful articles and books, and engaging in conversation about what we learn. These resources are centered on storytelling and can be cathartic – but the conversations themselves actually build bridges of understanding.

- [The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity in the United States](#) (Prince Brown and Joan Ferrante-Wallace) – This groundbreaking collection of classic and cutting-edge sociological research gives special attention to the social construction of race and ethnicity in the United States. It offers an in-depth and eye-opening analysis of:
 - The power of racial classification to shape our understanding of race
 - The way in which the system came into being and remains
 - The real consequences this system has on life chances

The readings deal with five major themes:

- The personal experience of classification schemes
- Classifying people by race
- Ethnic classification
- The persistence, functions, and consequences of social classification
- A new paradigm: transcending categories

For individuals who want to gain a fuller understanding of the impact the ideas of race has on a society that is consumed by it.

- Watch a video or movie, or read an article from the bibliography and discuss it using the following questions. Watch or read and discuss more than one resource. Most of the resources will take time to view or read. Take plenty of time and have several conversations centered on several of the resources.
 - Discussion questions:
 - What did you learn from the video, movie or article?
 - How does this resource match your experience?
 - With what parts of the resource do you agree?
 - With what parts of the resource do you disagree?
 - What impacted you the most?
 - What surprised you?
 - What did you experience that will change your life in how you relate to persons of different ethnicities?

Season 5

A Call to Action

As the groups finish the process, it is vital that this not be only a conversation but a call to take steps that will help eliminate racism. The intended outcome of this resource is action – to make a difference. Individual growth is a goal. Group growth is also a goal. Doing something tangible together can change the world.

Recap and discuss Seasons 1-4. Share the impact of the experience and how to continue to positively impact those around you to have conversations around race. Use these questions to facilitate that conversation:

- What have you learned about the people in your group?
- What new insights have you gained from participating in this group?
- How are you challenged to action?
- What one new thing can you do as an individual to respond to racism?
 - Be specific.
 - Write an action plan.
- What are we going to do about this now that we have had this experience together?
- What one strategy can you as a group do to respond to racism?
 - Be specific.
 - Write an action plan.
- We must have a commitment to do something beyond simply talking about this until we feel better. We should continue to check in to see how we are doing. We need a self- and group-check. How do we embody what we have talked about?

Resources for Conversations About Racism

General Commission on Religion and Race

GCORR's work centers on three priorities: supporting and leading vital conversations, developing culturally competent leadership and ministries, and promoting institutional equity while upholding the agency's historic commitment to racial justice within the church.

Videos

- [Deconstructing White Privilege with Dr. Robin DiAngelo](#)
- [Engaging Diversity in Vital Faith Communities](#)
- [Mistaking Urban Decay for "Blackness"](#)
- [Being an Ally with People of Color](#)
- [Continued Struggles in American Race Relations](#)
- [More GCORR videos](#)

Discussion Guides

- [Is Reverse Racism Really a "Thing?"](#)
- [Identity Politics and Social Location](#)
- [Racial Justice Conversations Guide](#)

Other Resources

- [Overt and Covert Racism](#)
- [What is Internalized Oppression?](#)
- [25 Traits of The Beloved Community](#)
- [Bearing Witness in the 21st Century: When Video Evidence Is Not Enough](#)
- [Equity vs. Equality: Understanding the Differences](#)

Documentaries

- ["13th"](#) (Netflix)
- ["Hello, Privilege. It's Me, Chelsea."](#) (Netflix)
- ["The Color of Compromise"](#) (Amazon Prime)
- ["This Far by Faith"](#) (PBS)
- ["The African Americans: Many Rivers To Cross"](#) (PBS)

Movies

- ["Just Mercy"](#) (Multiple services)
- ["Selma"](#) (Amazon Prime)
- ["Orangeburg: A Town, A Team, An American Tragedy"](#) (Jim Fabio)

Books

- [“Holding Up Your Corner: Talking About Race in Your Community”](#) by F. Willis Johnson
- [“Anxious to Talk About It: Helping White Christians Talk Faithfully about Racism”](#) by Carolyn B. Helsel
- [“White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism”](#) by Robin DiAngelo
- [“The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution”](#) by Eric Foner
- [“The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness”](#) by Michelle Alexander
- [“America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege and the Bridge to a New America”](#) by Jim Wallis
- [“The Cross and the Lynching Tree”](#) by James Cone
- [“Between the World and Me”](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- [“Out of Exodus: A Journey of Open and Affirming Ministry”](#) by Darryl W. Stephens
- [“Black People in the Methodist Church: Whither Thou Goest?”](#) by William B. McClain
- [“Singing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land”](#) by Joseph E. Lowery
- [“Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America”](#) by Michael Eric Dyson
- [The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity in the United States](#) by Prince Brown and Joan Ferrante-Wallace
- [“Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love”](#) by William H. Willimon

Other Suggested Learning Opportunities

- [National Museum of African-American History & Culture](#), Washington, D.C.
- [Birmingham Civil Rights Institute](#), Birmingham, Alabama



“Our Response To Racism:
Forming Authentic Connections Across Racial Lines”
was developed by a team from the [South Carolina Conference of
The United Methodist Church](#). It is intended for use by local
churches and other groups that desire to take steps to eliminate
racism and the separation it has fostered among God’s people.

We extend our appreciation to all involved for their work.

This resource can be downloaded at

umcsc.org/endr Racism

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