

# DISMANTLING RACISM DISCUSSION GUIDE

## THE THEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF COLONIALISM AND RACISM

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RELIGION & RACE  
The United Methodist Church

### OPENING PRAYER

Holy One who creates us All in Your own image.  
Help us to believe this.  
Help us to remember this.  
Help us to fight for this.  
May our identities be rooted in you and  
the way you have created us.  
In Christ's holy name, Emmanuel, we pray. Amen.

### INTRODUCING THE DISCUSSION

 [WATCH THE CONVERSATION](#)

Panelists include **Dr. Mai-Anh Le Tran**, the Rev. **Edgardo Colón--Emeric**, and **Dr. Willie James Jennings**.

If we as Christians are called to "love our neighbors," why do we see such racism within our religious communities and structures? Why does racism abound within the United States and across the world? How are our various identities tied up in all of this? Listen as we discuss and explore our true identity.

 [READ THE SUPPORTING ARTICLE](#)

### SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 1:27 (THE INCLUSIVE BIBLE)

Humankind was created as God's reflection: in the divine image God created them; female and male, God made them.

### DEVOTION/REFLECTION

Standing in the church office where I pastored several years ago, my staff member recounted the racism she experienced growing up in Jamaica. It came from her friends and family who, like her, were of African descent. She was singled out because her skin was too dark. She was treated differently, called names, and excluded from activities.

Growing up with three siblings, I related. I remember comparing our own brown arms to one another. Our comparison game was innocent enough; name calling and exclusion weren't part of it.

However, looking back, I cringe.

At a young age, we had figured out that the darkness of our complexions made a difference in how people treated us. We'd learned the lesson that lighter is better. Therefore, if I'm lighter, I'm better.

It wasn't lost on my siblings nor my staff member that the racism we were experiencing was often perpetrated by fellow Christians.

This is underscored in the panel, "The Theological Roots of Colonialism and Racism." For far too long, whiteness and the systems associated with it and Christianity have been intertwined with one another. From this perspective we have learned our own identity, whatever it might be.

Except our true identity rests not in whiteness, but in God.

From the very first pages of the Bible, we see that humanity (all of it) has been created in the image of God. This is our true identity. This identity, this sacredness, is bestowed upon us without merit simply by being created by God. Our identity (and that of others) must be that we are a person created in the image of God and thus of sacred worth. Are we living that out?

How might my staff member's childhood have been different if so? Mine? Yours?

Let's get to it.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to you to be created in the image of God? How do you honor and identify that in others, especially those who are different than you? In yourself?
- What makes you a Christian? Is it what you believe? Is it what you say? Is what you do? Some combination of all three?
- How do you identify others as Christian or not? Again, is it because of what they believe? What they say? What they do?
- How have you perpetuated the idea that “lighter is better?”
- How would you introduce yourself to a stranger if you wanted to describe yourself in a sentence or two? Pretend they can’t see you.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: WATCH, LISTEN, EXPLORE

### BEING AN ANTI-RACIST CHURCH

Watch the conversation between the Rev. Chip and Terri Freed of Garfield Memorial Church (UMC) and the Rev. Nathan Adams on how to be an anti-racist church and what it means to be a multiracial church. The conversation begins at the 36:00 mark.

 [WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

### “FACTS” BY LECRAE

 [LISTEN TO THE SONG ON YOUTUBE](#)

### BLACK LIKE US

Watch the Black-ish episode, “Black Like Us,” Season 5, Episode 10. It explores colorism and identity as discussed in this discussion guide. Watch on ABC.com and Hulu (with subscriptions).

### PRACTICE

Practice one of Dr. Mai-Anh Le Tran’s suggestions as it relates to (y)our theological task: repent, theologically educate yourself and/or your local church, reclaim your understanding of the resurrection, or become reenchanting with God’s complex world.

### WRITE

Write down how you feel you fit into the larger story of God that you are inside of as described by Dr. Willie James Jennings.

## NOTES:

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# DISMANTLING RACISM

Dismantling Racism is an initiative of  
The United Methodist Church.

[LEARN MORE.](#)

*This resource was designed with a United Methodist perspective, but we believe that the content is also relevant for non-UMC seekers who are doing anti-racism work with a spiritual foundation.*