



Several thousand United Methodist Women members were joined by local community activists as they marched from the Kentucky International Convention Center to Baxter Square Park in Louisville, Ky., demanding racial and economic justice during the 2014 United Methodist Women Assembly. (Paul Jeffrey)

MARCH 2015

Acting for Racial Justice:

A UNITED METHODIST WOMEN TRADITION OF WELCOME

By Janis Rosheuvel

On March 23, 2019, United Methodist Women will complete 150 years as a mission organization serving women, children and youth around the world. Each Program Book leading up to 2019 will include one program to highlight an issue that was a part of United Methodist Women's heritage and is still relevant today.

OBJECTIVE

That United Methodist Women members will examine the concept of racial justice and practice using tools to undo racial injustice as they prepare their hearts and minds for the 150th anniversary celebrations.

PREPARATION

Prayerfully prepare for the program, thinking of ways to make this time together meaningful for everyone attending the gathering.

Running time: This program is best done in 60 minutes. If you do not have the time, select sections that will fit the needs and interests of your group.

Materials

Gather the following items to use during the program:

- Copies of the Charter for Racial Justice for all participants. Available at www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/racial-justice.
- Copy of *Fellowship of Love, Methodist Women Changing American Racial Attitudes, 1920-1968* (Alice G. Knotts, 1996, Abingdon Press).
- Easel with paper or whiteboard and markers.

Resources

Make the following available for the program:

- Center for Media Justice: www.centerformediajustice.org.
- Free Press: www.freepress.net.
- Race Forward: www.raceforward.org.
- *The United Methodist Hymnal*.
- United Methodist Women Resources for Racial Justice manual: www.umwmissionresources.org/pdfs/racialjustice2012.pdf.
- United Methodist Women Bible (NRSV).

Participants

Before the meeting, ask individual women to help in the following roles:

- Welcome people as they walk in through the door.
- Lead the prayer (included in the program under Devotions).
- Read and lead the meditation (included in the program under Devotions).
- Facilitate the Exploration and Challenge for Mission sections (one to two people for each section).
- Help with activities.
- Lead the Closing section.

Room Setup

Set up the room with sufficient space for everyone to sit and move around as needed for the business meeting and the program.

- Conduct the meeting around a table, if appropriate, or it can be held in a circle or semicircle so that it is conducive to conversation.
- Set up a table large enough to allow everyone to participate in activities for the program portion. If you are gathering in a home, move to the dining table or other similar surface.
- Enjoy snacks and beverages!

Covenant

Begin the program by establishing some covenants for the conversation that can help create an environment of honesty, compassion and justice seeking. Start with the following items, and then ask the group to add to the list:

- Listen actively— with head and heart.
- Speak from your own experience.
- Participate to your level of comfort.

NOTES

DEVOTIONS

Pray for Your Collective Learning



READ: Psalm 145:4-7

Leader: One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

ALL: On the glorious splendor of your majesty, on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

Leader: The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness.

ALL: They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

Meditate on United Methodist Women’s Past, Present and Future Racial Justice Work

As United Methodist Women prepares to celebrate 150 years of service for women, children and youth, it is crucial to learn from our storied tradition of working for racial justice. This work is chronicled in Alice G. Knotts’ book *Fellowship of Love, Methodist Women Changing American Racial Attitudes, 1920-1968*. In it, the author details the journey of our foremothers who at varying points faced confusion, resistance, joy and hope. What remained true for them throughout this long, hard struggle was “persistence and genuine human caring.” Our mandate to realize a fully racially just world where all are welcomed remains a crucial part of who we are as members of United Methodist Women!

REFLECT

This section reflects how Methodist women demonstrated their commitment to the struggle for racial justice.

Social transformation is, at its heart, spiritual ... God called white Methodist women to a higher vision. The white leaders believed that they were the children of God, and that African Americans were also God’s children. In spite of prejudice, they responded to the invitations and concerns of black women. They risked new behaviors that began to undermine their understandings of race. They were about to discover that an inequitable social system perpetuates lawlessness and genocide.¹

Discuss the following questions:

- How does knowing that you are part of a long and meaningful tradition of working for racial justice make you feel?
- How is United Methodist Women called to realize racial justice today?

EXPLORATION


Explore tools for racial justice.

Why it is important to build on the tradition of racial justice that is a large part of United Methodist Women's legacy?

Encourage one to three people to share answers with the group.

The Charter for Racial Justice was adopted by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in 1980. Let us listen to the following excerpt from the Charter for Racial Justice to help us understand United Methodist Women's institutional obligation to racial justice:


"We will create opportunities in local churches to deal honestly with the existing racist attitudes and social distance between members, deepening the Christian commitment to be the church where all racial groups and economic classes come together."

 **ASK:** What is our mandate as United Methodist Women members, personally and collectively (as a unit, district, conference, organization), to understand, examine and act for racial justice?


Racial Justice Terms and Definitions:

As a next step in this conversation, let us ensure that we have the same understanding of terms and definitions. Review the racial justice terms and definitions below (adapted from Race Forward workshop materials)² by reading these definitions aloud and using the reflection questions to clarify their meaning and implications.

1. **Racial Justice** is the creation of proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, treatment, opportunities and outcomes for all.

 **ASK:** What are the key words in this definition?

2. **Structural Racism** is racial bias across institutions and society. It is the cumulative and compounded effects of an array of factors that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color.

 **ASK:** What is an institution that you are involved in? How might institutions *systematically* privilege white people and disadvantage people of color?

How Structural Racism Stays Alive

- **History:** Roots and cumulative impacts of inequities (e.g., Homestead Act, G.I. Bill).
- **Culture:** Normalizing and repeating of dominant ideas and power dynamics (in media, movies, magazines).
- **Interconnected institutions and policies:** Compounding relationships and rules that reinforce inequities (stop-and-frisk, prison industrial complex).
- **Ideology:** Popular ideas and myths that perpetuate hierarchies (“welfare queens,” “moochers”).

Tips for Addressing Racial Injustice

To address the legacy and ongoing manifestations of racial injustice, focus on:

- Dealing with *systems* not symptoms.
- Shifting focus from personal prejudice to undoing institutional inequity.
- Focusing on impacts not intentions. Even if our intentions are good, the impact may be to unintentionally reinforce injustices.
- Being explicit but not exclusive (remember all oppressions intersect so we must address issues of race and class, gender, disability, nationality, immigration status, etc.).
- Addressing proactive strategies rather than being reactive to grievances.

“**O**ur mandate to realize a fully racially just world where all are welcomed remains a crucial part of who we are as members of United Methodist Women!”

Practicing Racial Justice Skills

At this time we will be examining the media and racial justice.



ASK: How do we use and experience media in the United States?
What are the racial justice implications of our media use/interactions?

The following information will help to deepen the conversation and connect their everyday experiences with media to the information they hear below.

Current State of the Media in the United States³

- The news offers infotainment, sensationalism and celebrity gossip, while key stories about social and political issues impacting our lives are unmentioned.
- Society is misrepresented. What we see on the news does not reflect real life. We see stereotypes (race, gender, income, etc.) instead of nuance.
- Internet access is too expensive. There is a real and growing digital divide.
- The average American spends more than four hours a day watching TV.
- The communications industry has spent more than \$1 billion to lobby Congress since 1998. That's more than \$100 million a year.
- The Telecommunications Act of 1996 allowed ownership expansion that enabled a broadcast entity to own a vast number of media outlets in the same geographical area.
- Only one in five daily newspapers is published by independent publishing companies.
- Commercial media make money through advertising, which means controversy leads, there is a lack of diversity, local issues are marginalized and there is less investigative reporting.
- On average, an American child will view 40,000 commercials a year.
- Fewer than 8 percent of radio stations and only 3 percent of TV stations are owned by people of color.
- Big media entities that have tremendous power in Washington include: NBCUniversal, Condé Nast, Clear Channel, News Corp, Viacom, Disney, Time Warner, Comcast.

Discuss the following questions

Record responses on newsprint or whiteboard.

- What are the implications of the facts we just heard about current state of our media?
- What are the racial justice risks of having all our news funneled through a few media conglomerates?
- If “Big Media” have a disproportionate amount of money to influence policymakers, what do organizations like United Methodist Women have to offer as a counterweight?

CHALLENGE FOR MISSION

What actions can you take?

In your large group, examine the following images to evaluate what is happening in each photo and caption.⁴



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO CAPTION
AS IT APPEARED ON AP WEBSITE:

A young man walks through chest deep flood water after **looting** a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005. Flood waters continue to rise in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina did extensive damage when it made landfall Monday. (AP Photo/Dave Martin)



AFP PHOTO CAPTION AS IT APPEARED
ON AFP WEBSITE:

Two residents waded through chest-deep water after **finding** bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area 29 August 2005 in New Orleans, Louisiana. (AP Image/Getty Image by Chris Graythen)

After looking at the photos and captions together, reflect on the following questions:

- What are the underlying racial assumptions being shown here?
- How does each photo and caption reinforce or challenge racial bias?
- What are the implications of these photos and captions being framed in this manner?



ASK: What questions could you ask that would help you to analyze media through a racial justice lens in the future?

Encourage members to share their questions aloud and make a list on the newsprint or whiteboard. Later, type this list and share it with participants as a reminder of their commitments.

CLOSING

Sit in silence together for one to two minutes.

Let us pray together:

God, please grant us the grace to never sell ourselves short. Grace to risk something big for something good. Grace to know that the world is now too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love. **Amen.**

Sing

*“In Christ there is no East or West,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 548*

This hymn served as one of the theme songs for many Protestant churches working on race relations during the civil rights struggle in the United States.

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Notes

OCTOBER 2014

1. Stephanie Spellers, *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other and the Spirit of Transformation* (New York: Church Publishing Inc., 2006), 6.
2. The phrase *kin-dom* of God was first coined by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz. It emphasizes relationality, community and equity as the basis of God's reign. It is an obvious contrast to systems of oppression and relations of domination.
3. Spellers, *Radical Welcome*, 6.
4. Elaine Magalis, *Conduct Becoming to a Woman: Bolted Doors and Burgeoning Missions*, revised edition (New York: Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, 2003), 102.

JANUARY 2015

1. Stephanie Spellers, "Characteristics of a Radically Welcoming Community," *Building Faith*, July 15, 2011, www.buildfaith.org/2011/07/15/characteristics-of-a-radically-welcoming-community.

MARCH 2015

1. Alice Knotts, *Fellowship of Love: Methodist Women Changing American Racial Attitudes, 1920-1968* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1996), 56.
2. Source: Race Forward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation. Race Forward advances racial justice through research, media and practice. For more information, please visit: www.raceforward.org.
3. "Media Policy 101: What You Need to Know to Change the Media," *Free Press*, 2008, www.freepress.net/sites/default/files/fp-legacy/Media_Policy_101.pdf.
4. Van Jones, "Black People 'Loot' Food ... White People 'Find' Food," *Huffington Post*, September 1, 2005, www.huffingtonpost.com/van-jones/black-people-loot-food-wh_b_6614.html.

MAY 2015

1. "Fast Facts: Teen Pregnancy in the United States," The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, March 2013, www.thenationalcampaign.org/resource/fast-facts-teen-pregnancy-united-states; "Incidence, Prevalence and Cost of Sexually Transmitted Infections in the United States," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fact Sheet, February 2013, www.cdc.gov/std/stats/sti-estimates-fact-sheet-feb-2013.pdf; "Effective Sex Education," *Advocates for Youth*, 2006, www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications450.