

From the Gower Affirm Advisory Committee:

Over the past few days, people all over the U.S., Canada, and the world have protested the tragic death of George Floyd. His family is mourning the loss of a son, father, brother ... but his death has taken on a worldwide significance in addressing the persistent and pervasive conditions of inequity and injustice that led to this, and countless other acts of oppression that we, in our silence, are complicit. As an Affirming Ministry, we are called to speak and act out in solidarity. But in order to do this effectively, we need to understand the depth and breadth of the issue. And the language that surrounds it.

We hope that the resources provided below serve to answer questions you may have as you reflect on and respond to this call to action...

What is diversity? Archbishop Desmond Tutu

“We inhabit a universe that is characterized by diversity. There is not just one planet or one star; there are galaxies of all different sorts, a plethora of animal species, different kinds of plants, and different races and ethnic groups. God shows us, even with a human body, that it is made up of different organs performing different functions and that it is precisely that diversity that makes it an organism. If it were only one organ, it would not be a human body. We are constantly being made aware of the glorious diversity that is written into the structure of the universe we inhabit, and we are helped to see that if it were otherwise, things would go awry. How could you have a soccer team if all were goalkeepers? How would it be an orchestra if all were French horns?

For Christians, who believe they are created in the image of God, it is the Godhead, diversity in unity and the three-in-oneness of God, which we and all creation reflect. It is this *imago Dei* too that invests each single one of us — whatever our race, gender, education, and social or economic status — with infinite worth, making us precious in God’s sight. That worth is intrinsic to who we are, not dependent on anything external, extrinsic. Thus there can be no superior or inferior race. We are all of equal worth, born equal in dignity and born free, and for this reason deserving of respect whatever our external circumstances. We are created freely for freedom as those who are decision-making animals and so as of right entitled to respect, to be given personal space to be autonomous. We belong in a world whose very structure, whose essence, is diversity, almost bewildering in extent. It is to live in a fool’s paradise to ignore this basic fact.

We live in a universe marked by diversity as the law of its being and our being. We are made to exist in a life that should be marked by cooperation, interdependence, sharing, caring, compassion and complementarity. We should celebrate our diversity; we should exult in our differences as making not for separation and alienation and hostility but for their glorious opposites. The law of our being is to live in solidarity, friendship, helpfulness, unselfishness, interdependence and complementarity as sisters and brothers in one family — the human family, God’s family. Anything else, as we have experienced, is disaster.”

<http://www.tutufoundationusa.org/tag/racism/>

What is systemic or structural racism? Mary Frances O’Dowd

“Systemic racism”, or “institutional racism”, refers to how ideas of white superiority are captured in everyday thinking at a systems level: taking in the big picture of how society operates, rather than looking at one-on-one interactions. These systems can include laws and regulations, but also unquestioned social systems. Systemic racism can stem from education, hiring practices or access. Systemic racism assumes white superiority individually, ideologically and institutionally. The assumption of superiority can pervade thinking consciously and unconsciously. One most obvious example is apartheid, but even with anti-discrimination laws, systemic racism continues.

Individuals may not see themselves as racist, but they can still benefit from systems that privilege white faces and voices. Anti-racism activist Peggy McIntosh popularised the understanding of the systemic nature of racism with her famous “invisible knapsack” quiz looking at white privilege.

The quiz asks you to count how many statements you agree with, for items such as:

- I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented
- I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race
- I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.

The statements highlight taken-for-granted privileges, and enable people to understand how people of colour may experience society differently.

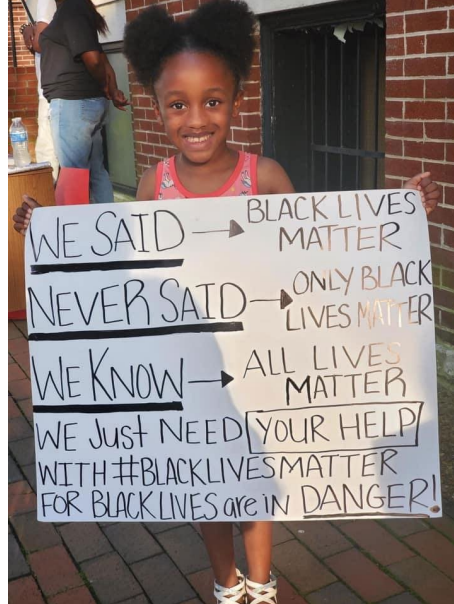
Under systemic racism, systems of education, government and the media celebrate and reward some cultures over others. In employment, names can influence employment opportunities. A Harvard study found job candidates were more likely to get an interview when they “whitened” their name. Only 10% of black candidates got interview offers when their race could be implied by their resume, but 25% got offers when their resumes were whitened. And 21% of Asian candidates got interview offers with whitened resumes, up from 11.5%.

Systemic racism damages lives, restricting access and capacity for contribution. It damages the ethical society we aspire to create. When white people scoop all the awards, it reinforces a message that other cultures are just not quite good enough. Public advocacy is critical. Speaking up is essential. Racism is more than an individual issue. When systemic injustices remain unspoken or accepted, an unethical white privilege is fostered. When individuals and groups point out systemic injustices and inequities, the dominant culture is made accountable.

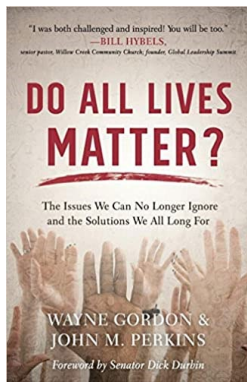
<https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-systemic-racism-and-institutional-racism-131152>

What does it mean to say: Black Lives Matter!? Reverend Dan Schatz, Unitarian Universalist

“To say that Black lives matter is not to say that other lives do not; indeed, it is quite the reverse—it is to recognize that all lives do matter, and to acknowledge that African Americans are often targeted unfairly (witness the number of African Americans accosted daily for no reason other than walking through a White neighborhood—including some, like young Trayvon Martin, who lost their lives) and that our society is not yet so advanced as to have become truly color blind. This means that many people of goodwill face the hard task of recognizing that these societal ills continue to exist, and that White privilege continues to exist, even though we wish it didn't and would not have asked for it. I certainly agree that no loving God would judge anyone by skin color.”



Don't All Lives Matter?



The belief that all lives matter is at the heart of our founding documents--but we must admit that this conviction has never truly reflected reality in America. Movements such as Black Lives Matter have arisen in response to recent displays of violence and mistreatment, and some of us defensively answer back, "All lives matter." But do they? Really? This book is an exploration of that question. It delves into history and current events, into Christian teaching and personal stories, in order to start a conversation about the way forward. Its raw but hopeful words will help move us from apathy to empathy and from empathy to action. We cannot do everything. But we can each do something.

How Shall We Respond to Racial Injustice?

What is the church's role in the work of curtailing the violence, injustice, and polarization in our societies?

<https://www.united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/how-shall-we-respond-racial-injustice>

White privilege: Reflecting on the unearned benefits of being white. Jennifer Henry

The path towards racial justice is both an inward and outward journey. It's about turning in to address aspects of racism that persist in our churches, communities, families, and ourselves—and turning outward to advocate for racial justice in our world. White privilege includes the unquestioned, unearned, most often unconscious, advantages, entitlements, benefits, choices, assumptions, and expectations bestowed on white people based solely on membership in the culturally dominant, white group.¹ This concept is important because it helps us to see that racism is not only about intolerant, mean, or hateful beliefs/actions of individuals, but it is also systemic. There are structures and systems that deprive certain people or communities—people of colour and Indigenous peoples—while white people or communities benefit.

Our Faith: We believe that God's love and justice is for each and all, and we affirm the sacredness of each person within a web of creation that is good. Systems that privilege one over another under-mine those core beliefs.

Relationships: We acknowledge that racism—individual acts but also systemic action—was and is deadly for Indigenous peoples, and people of colour, both in Canada and around the globe. Racism affects the collective Body of Christ.

Movements: As people of faith, if we want to add our voice to and witness movements of truth and reconciliation, Indigenous justice, and #BlackLivesMatter, we need to examine not just the racism “out there” but “in here.” How might we, even unconsciously, be acting out of, enabling, and/or supporting white privilege?

The Moment: Recent political events appear to have made racism more visible and legitimate, endangering Indigenous communities and communities of colour. This requires us as church to give greater visibility and legitimacy to the dis-sent to racism and actions of equity and justice.

https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/white_privilege_a_workshop.pdf

¹ Source: Cultural Bridges to Justice: www.culturalbridgestojustice.org; search under “white-privilege.”

White Privilege: The Elephant in the Room:

“In this time of change, the ideological underpinnings of White Privilege continue to constrain us at an institutional and congregational level.”

<https://www.united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/white-privilege-elephant-room>

Recommended Resources from the White Privilege Task Group – United

Church of Canada: ““White privilege” is not a new term, but it can still create feelings of unease or defensiveness among many “White race” people. I speak of “White race” because while we can talk about a “Black race,” or other racial identity groups, but many people tend to think of “White” as the human race or not a racial group at all. Within North American cultures, White is often considered to be the societal or aspirational norm, which means that all others are the exception, and all other racial groups exist within the culture of Whiteness. By understanding “White” as a racial identity along with other racial identity groupings, we can better see the gift and diversity of the whole human family.” — Bill Smith, former Bay of Quinte Executive Secretary and chair of White Privilege Working Group, January 2019

https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/resources_white-priviledge-task-group.pdf

Some resources for children:



In this empowering new picture book, beloved author Peter H. Reynolds explores the many ways that a single voice can make a difference. Each of us, each and every day, have the chance to **say something**: with our actions, our words, and our voices. Perfect for kid activists everywhere, this timely story reminds readers of the undeniable importance and power of their voice. There are so many ways to tell the world who you are... what you are thinking... and what you believe. And how you'll make it better.



Race Cars is a children's book about white privilege. It was created to serve as a springboard for parents and educators to facilitate tough conversations with their kids about race, privilege and oppression. Race Cars tells the story of 2 best friends, a white car and a black car, that have different experiences and face different rules while entering the same race.

Recommitting to Justice, Equity, and Peace — Alydia Smith

God of peace,
give us the courage, strength and perseverance needed,
to challenge the systems of racism,
so that we can clear a path for your justice, peace, and equity.

We believe racism is present
in our society and in our church,
and throughout time has manifested itself in many forms and in varying degrees.

We know racism is alive
in our language and in our structures,
and through our systems it actively works to deconstruct your glorious design,
blocking the path to justice, equity, and peace that Jesus brings.

Racism exists, and it challenges the gospel message that we cry.

We cry abundant life for all,
knowing that we are slowly being suffocated by the pervasive evil of racism:
 some of us are choking;
 some of us cannot breathe;
 some of us are dead.

We cry peace,
knowing that we are the instruments of God's peace

and that such peace cannot exist without justice, equity, compassion, and God's grace.

We cry Emmanuel, God with us,
knowing that to God, every life matters—God is with all people—
even though as a community and as a society
we have stated through our actions that some lives matter more than others.

Compassionate One,
Help us to understand how racism finds life in our hearts and in our cries.
In this time of tense anticipation,
may we commit ourselves to be people of your way
crying and creating a path for justice, equity, and peace
for all people in this wilderness of hatred and racism.

Amen.

<https://www.united-church.ca/prayers/recommitting-justice-equity-and-peace>