

Suggested Topics for District/Conference Webinars/Conversation Starters on Healing Racial Divides *by Rev. Shirley Burke, co-pastor Coke Memorial UMC*

- 1- **Black Outrage vs. Black Rage.** Discuss the difference between **Rage** (*a fit of violence and uncontrolled anger*) and **Outrage** (*the anger and resentment aroused by injury, insult, disrespect, violation of rights, or unfair practices*). **Discuss examples** of Black Outrage in society at large, the church/UMC, the workplace, police brutality, etc.

Some Examples:

- a) **COVID-19 Testing.** Even though the African American community at large had disproportionately high numbers of cases of COVID-19, initial testing was done at “drive-up” locations. The problem with this is, many African Americans do not own a car, or could not afford to pay a taxi. Weeks went by & death tolls climbed before “walk-up” testing was available.
- b) **Appointment Opportunities.** Many congregations are unwilling to have an African American or non-whites as a pastor, which severely limits appointment opportunities for those pastors.
- c) **Promotions in the Workplace.** Many African Americans are overlooked for promotions, even though they meet the requirements for qualifications. Many do not even get the opportunity for an interview.
- d) **The “Prison Pipeline”.** Some states determine how many prisons to build based upon African American, Latino, or non-white 3rd graders’ school performance. There is more effort in preparations to imprison them later in life than to put energies into helping those students succeed educationally NOW.
- e) **Red-Lining.** The practice of preventing home loans & business loans, etc., to “certain” people residing in “certain” communities has existed since 1934. This practice detrimentally affects neighborhood growth, healthcare, and schools.

2- **Are You Anti-Racist or Not Racist?**

Discuss meaning of Not Racist (*riding oneself of racist attitudes, beliefs & behaviors by mostly remote efforts. One’s silence supports, reinforces & perpetuates the problem. Taking the stance of, “Well, I’m not calling anyone names or doing anything hateful, so I have no responsibility.”*)

Discuss the meaning of being Anti-Racist (*active rebuttals of prejudices and racism in your own circles, being aware of the messages you send to your family, friends, places of worship and outside activities. Intentionally thinking about, verbalizing, and acting upon how to interrupt racist stereotypes, policies, practices and systems that surround you.*)

Discuss the questions: 1) *How do individual decisions sparked by racism and prejudice morph into collective oppressive psyches? and; 2) How do everyday decisions lead to calling the police on black people for no reason, hate crimes, withheld inalienable rights and police brutality incidents?*

Make a commitment.

Be Aware: You can't filter out biases unless you are aware of them. Dislodging racism, prejudice, & stereotypes from the mind is hard because they usually are unconscious biases. Awareness of any prejudice, stereotypes, or racism you may have is the **FIRST STEP**. Then, **EDUCATE YOURSELF** on the negative effects of racism on literally every aspect of life. Offer suggested readings.

Practice: *When you have a prejudiced or racist thought, **hold that thought & reassess it** before acting it out.*

Act: *List 3 specific things I can do to interrupt racist stereotypes & practices in my home? In my church?*

3- Microaggressions: Addressing the Unseen Parts of the Racial Iceberg.

Discuss what the tip of the racial iceberg is (*aggressions of calling people racist names, threatening, injuring, assaulting or killing people on the basis of race*).

Discuss what microaggressions* are (the range of subtle but insidious racial attitudes, behaviors and policies. They are part of the iceberg, but "hidden under the water's surface." They are brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities. They can be intentional, unintentional or even well-meaning. But they communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial assumptions to the receiver. They have an **insidious effect** on a black person's psyche and continuing racist assumptions. Per Justice Horn, a social justice activist from Kansas City, Missouri, "*These racist tendencies are obvious to the person of color, but they are so ingrained in the non-person of color that they are believed to be socially acceptable.*").

***The term "microaggressions" was created & developed in 1986 by Dr. Chester M. Pierce, who was a tenured African American professor of education and psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, a consultant for "Sesame Street", a full professor at Massachusetts General Hospital, and past president of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and the American Ortho-psychiatric Association. Dr. Pierce died in 2016 at the age of 89.**

Examples of Common Microaggressions (Maybe they can be put on cards & discussed):

- a) **“You are so well spoken” or “You don’t sound black.”** This sounds like a compliment, but it’s offensive to lots of black people because it implies that black people are not expected to be articulate or coherent. Because the articulate black person doesn’t fit the white person’s stereotype, the white person feels it is a compliment because the black person doesn’t fit “the mold.”
- b) **“Reparations??? Don’t blame me—I never owned slaves.”** This statement assumes that racism ended with the end of the Civil War. The reality is, it has continued in new forms of modern slavery (such as mass incarcerations and continued discrimination) that white people still benefit from.
- c) **“White privilege doesn’t exist.”** Differences in racial privilege occur on a personal basis too. White privilege means not having to worry about:
- Whether your hairstyle will cost you a job or even an interview
 - Whether your zip code will cost you a job or even an interview
 - Someone following you around a store because they think you might steal something because of your skin color.
 - Denied an appointment or opportunity because you are the “wrong” race.
- d) **Cross-racial adoption mindsets: Savior Complex vs. Kidnapper Complex..**
When a white person adopts a child from another race, they are considered a hero for “saving” the child from a 3rd-world country or a poverty-stricken environment. If they adopt a black or African child, they often fail to learn how to properly groom the child’s hair, which is problematic for the child. When a black person adopts a white or non-black child, they are considered a “kidnapper.” It is VERY common for white police to approach the adoptive parent in public, demanding that the parent show proof of adoption. It is also common for white people to call the police on the adoptive parent. This sends a bad message to blacks whose love transcends race.
- e) **Right-of-way-complex.** When walking on city streets or thoroughfares in the mall, marketplaces or public places, some white people often deliberately walk towards black people in a way to “make them” move out of their way. This is demeaning, rude, and frustrating to numerous black people and is another way for whites to show their “superiority” and the “inferiority” of people of color.
- f) **“I am not racist—I have lots of black friends.”** People who say this might be equating racism with prejudice. Prejudice is an attitude based on stereotypes. Racism entails the policies and practices that perpetrate notions of white superiority and inferiority of people of color. One may not harbor racial prejudice or hate in their heart, but ties with black people don’t keep you from engaging in discriminatory behavior and/or challenging racist practices.
- g) **“Can I touch your hair (or your baby’s hair)?”** Curiosity is OK, but crossing boundaries is NOT. The question may not be intentionally offensive, but it can make

a black person feel as if they are an animal on display. **Why?** Because white people likely do not ask that of any other race of people. It also continues the antiquated idea of black people as “other” or a scientific novelty.

- h) **“We’re all one human race/big happy family.”** This statement seeks to alleviate racism or complaints of it. The phrase is biologically correct, given genetic similarities. But in terms of social interactions, we don’t behave as if we were all one race.
- i) **“I’m colorblind—I don’t care if you’re white, black, yellow, green or purple.”** The intention is inclusivity, but people of color are saying their color and identity matter and affect how they experience the world. Saying this is offensive because it could imply you are not listening to or don’t care about what other groups of people are telling you about their experience.
- j) **Clutching your purse or dodging while passing a black man.** This behavior implies that black men are dangerous. It’s based on a fear that responds to a stereotype that categorizes black men as threats.
- k) **Saying “ALL lives matter” in response to the Black Lives Matter movement.** Those who say “all lives matter” may be interpreting the phrase “black lives matter” as “only black lives matter”, which isn’t the case. The phrase means “black lives matter, too.” In this context, it’s black lives that are not being treated with respect. This is why the Black Lives Matter movement exists. So when someone says “all lives matter” without acknowledging the movement, they’re ignoring the anti-black racism and the numerous examples of it regarding police interactions with blacks.
- l) **“Pardon my French...”** First of all, it’s NOT French. When a white person assumes it’s OK for them to use foul or vulgar language when in the company of black persons, it is offensive because it is based on the stereotype that all black people talk that way because they are “low-life.”
- m) **Gleaning ideas/services from people of color without offering them compensation or recognition.** There [still] exists the practice of pulling ideas or services from people of color without paying them for or acknowledging their contribution. Oftentimes, a white person benefits from the idea and passes it off as their own so they can get credit for it. Sometimes a needed service is requested of and performed by a person of color that goes unpaid. This is offensive because if the same idea/service is performed by a white person, they will be financially compensated for it, and/or receive recognition. This mentality is akin to having a slave that you can require much from but are not obligated to pay them.
- n) **Systematically dumping junk in black neighborhoods, then saying “blacks don’t care about their surroundings.”** This is so overwhelming an ordeal for blacks. Not only are large household junk (furniture, mattresses, TV’s, etc.) dumped in alleys and overpasses, but captured pests (ground squirrels, possums, raccoons, etc.) are as well.

Negative Effects of Microaggressions :

- They are so common, that it's like "death by a thousand cuts"
- Contribute to increased blood pressure
- Contribute to physical reactions
- Contribute to lower feelings of well-being
- They wear people down
- Contribute to various forms of PTSD
- Contribute to hopelessness. *"Hope deferred makes the heart sick. But when desire cometh, it is a tree of life." Prov. 13:12*

The goal is not to win an argument or promote guilt, but to foster understanding through education and create environments for peaceful conversations, growth, and Christ-likeness.

SPEAK UP IN YOUR OWN CIRCLES

You may have friends, family and colleagues with varying degrees of complicity with racism. If they make a racist remark, it's easier to ignore it so you don't make waves.

Challenging racist comments requires effort; it might make you uncomfortable or even result in conflict or lost opportunities.

You need to be willing, committed and able to rebut problematic remarks and engage people in informative conversations about race at the dinner table, over board games or at ball games.

If you have children, they are watching how you respond to racist Uncle Frank—or not.

Speaking up in your own circles benefits the offended person(s) and everyone else. Racism harms people of color especially, but it also shrinks the lives and damages the psyche of its perpetrators.

Understand that racism is insidious in nature—it has both a gradual and cumulative effect which entraps because it is treacherous. It has hidden dangers and perils.

The problem of racism is exacerbated when people are not willing to speak out against prejudice and racism when there are no people of color around.

Suggestions for how to speak up in your own circle:

- **Build up your stamina**, because speaking up is not just a single conversation and then it's fixed. This is a long-term effort. Like running a marathon—you have to train for it. Commit to being in it for the "long haul."

- **Build up your prayer life.** Racism is sin. It is a pandemic that has global impact. **2 Chronicles 7:14** says, *“If My people, which are called by My name, will humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land.”*
- **Be educated.** Read some books to help you understand the history and effects of racism, and let God transform your mind.
- Say you are uncomfortable with what someone said because it sounded racist to you. That person will decide whether to ask why. If they don’t, try having a later conversation with them and ask if you can share what you’ve learned and the history that made their comment offensive. They may or may not want to talk about it, but how far you push depends on your relationship.
- Host a gathering and discuss statements or phrases of microaggressions.
- Have conversations around differences vs. “different-ness.”
- **Practice the Golden Rule:** *“And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.” **Luke 6:31 NKJV***