

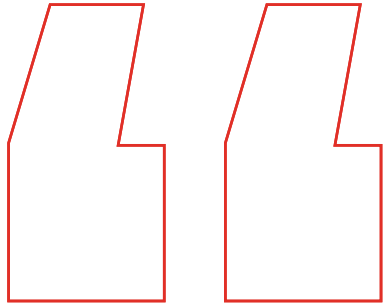
FIFTH AVENUE'S COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

CULTIVATING EMPATHY THROUGH DEEP CONVERSATION

An Anti-Racism Curriculum
for Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church
January 2021

**Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church's
Anti-Racist Response Team (ARRT)**

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As God's chosen ones,
holy and beloved,
clothe yourselves with
compassion, kindness,
humility, meekness,
and patience.

—*Colossians 3:12*

To the Community Group Leader

We have created this handbook for you as you guide your group through what we hope is a deep, heartfelt discussion rooted in personal experiences and stories. Our hope is that you use this as a guide for your weekly discussions.

In this guide, you will find a list of values to guide your time together. For each week, we have also provided a set of pre-work: readings, podcasts, and videos, and a question to mediate or journal on. We have provided quite a bit of material for pre-work. We recommend that members **Read, Watch, Listen** to at least one of the items in each week's list.

During the group session, we recommend the following structure:

- **Opening Prayer** (2 minutes)
- **Set the Tone** (2–5 minutes)
 - For week 1, discuss the Grounding Virtues as a group
 - For weeks 2–4, remind the group of the Grounding Virtues
- **Reflection question** (10–15 minutes)
 - What resonated from this week's Read/Watch/Listen?
- **Sharing time** (20–30 minutes)
 - Invite group members to share their thoughts and stories from the reflection question
 - It is not necessary for all members to share, but please check-in with typically quieter members
- **FAPC Courageous Conversations video** (10–15 minutes)
 - Watch the video and discuss the video as a group
- **Going Forward** (5–10 minutes)
 - What will you personally, or as a group take home from this conversation? This may be an 'ah-ha' moment of realization or an aspirational hope for the future.
- **Closing Prayer** (2 minutes)

The curriculum covers 4 specific themes:

1. Why now?
2. What are the historical roots of racism in this country and in American Christianity?
3. How does change happen?
4. Where do we go from here?

We believe this is just the start of the conversation here at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, and in our communities. We are not looking to "solve racism," rather we hope that we are encouraging deep, meaningful conversations with fellow members of Fifth Ave, who don't all look alike, think alike, but by the grace of God are united, knit together as God's people.

In Christ, ARRT

Grounding Virtues

At the start of each session, please share a reminder that *“Our Words Matter; We aim to Practice Hospitality; Engage with Humility; Be Patient; Listen Generously and Be Adventurous in our Civility.”*

Words That Matter

We are starved for fresh language to approach each other. We need what Elizabeth Alexander calls “words that shimmer”—words with power that convey real truth, which cannot be captured in mere fact.

Words have the force of action and become virtues in and of themselves. The words we use shape how we understand ourselves, how we interpret the world, how we treat others.

Words are one of our primary ways to reach across the mystery of each other. As technology reframes the meaning of basic human acts like making and leading and belonging, the world needs the most vivid and transformative universe of words we can muster.

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Hospitality

Hospitality is a bridge to all the great virtues, but it is immediately accessible. You don't have to love or forgive or feel compassion to extend hospitality. But it's more than an invitation. It is the creation of an inviting, trustworthy space—an atmosphere as much as a place. It shapes the experience to follow. It creates the intention, the spirit, and the boundaries for what is possible. As creatures, it seems, we imagine a homogeneity in other groups that we believe not to be there in our own. But new social realities are brought into being over time by a quality of relationship between unlikely combinations of people. When in doubt, practice hospitality.

Humility

Humility is a companion to curiosity, surprise, and delight. Spiritual humility is not about getting small. It is about encouraging others to be big. It is not about debasing oneself but about approaching everything and everyone with a readiness to be surprised and delighted. This is the humility of the child. It is the humility in the spirituality of the scientist and the mystic—to be planted in what you know, while living expectantly for discoveries yet to come.

The wisest people we've interviewed carry a humility that manifests as tenderness in a creative interplay with power.

Grounding Virtues

Patience

Like humility, patience is not to be mistaken for meekness and ineffectuality. It can be the fruit of a full-on reckoning with reality—a commitment to move through the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. A spiritual view of time is a long view of time—seasonal and cyclical, resistant to the illusion of time as a bully, time as a matter of deadlines. Human transformation takes time—longer than we want it to—but it is what is necessary for social transformation. A long, patient view of time will replenish our sense of our capacities and our hope for the world.

Generous Listening

Listening is an everyday art and virtue, but it's an art we have lost and must learn anew. Listening is more than being quiet while others have their say. It is about presence as much as receiving; it is about connection more than observing. Real listening is powered by curiosity. It involves vulnerability—a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. It is never in "gotcha" mode. The generous listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other and patiently summons one's own best self and one's own most generous words and questions.

Adventurous Civility

The adventure of civility for our time can't be a mere matter of politeness or niceness. Adventurous civility honors the difficulty of what we face and the complexity of what it means to be human. It doesn't celebrate diversity by putting it up on a pedestal and ignoring its messiness and its depths. The intimate and civilizational questions that perplex and divide us will not be resolved quickly. Civility, in our world of change, is about creating new possibilities for living forward while being different and even continuing to hold profound disagreement.

Derived from the *On Being Civil Conversations Project*



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Week 1: Why Now?

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PRE-WORK

Please choose to either read, watch, or listen to one of these resources (you can do all three if you'd like). Please take a look at the reflection question prior to your group meeting:

- **Read:** *"Letter from Birmingham Jail", Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- **Watch:** *Understanding Anti-Racism*
- **Listen:** *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together?" & Discussion Guide*
- **Reflection Question & Journal:**

Genesis 1:27: So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

- Q.** Think of your earliest race-related memory. How old were you? What emotion, if any, is attached to the incident you recalled? Did you talk to anyone—a parent, teacher or another caring adult—about what happened? If not, why not?



GROUP DISCUSSION

- **Opening Prayer** (2 minutes)
- **Set the Tone** (2–5 minutes)
 - Discuss the Grounding Virtues as a group
- **Check-Ins/Introductions**
 - Catch up with/Get to know each other (5 minutes)
 - What is your name? Where in the country are you? In one to two sentences, what brought you to this community group and conversations around racial injustice?
- **Reflection question** (10–15 minutes)
 - What resonated from this week's Read/Watch/Listen ?
- **Sharing time** (20–30 minutes)
 - Think of your earliest race-related memory. How old were you? What emotion, if any, is attached to the memory? Did you talk to anyone—a parent, teacher or another caring adult—about what happened? If not, why not?



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Week 1: Why Now?

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- **FAPC Courageous Conversations video** (10–15 minutes)
 - Watch *Jane's Courageous Conversation* together
 - What surprised or intrigued you about Jane's video?
- **Going Forward** (5–10 minutes)
 - What will you (personally, or as a group) take home from this conversation?
- **Closing Prayer** (2 minutes)
 - *God of all,
in your love
you made all the nations of the world
to be a family
and your Son taught us to love one another.
Yet our world is riven apart
with prejudice, arrogance, and pride.
Help the different races
to love and understand one another better.
Increase among us sympathy,
tolerance, and goodwill,
that we may learn to appreciate the gifts
that other races bring to us,
and to see in all people
our siblings for whom Christ died.
Save us from jealousy, hatred, and
fear, and help us to live together
as members of one family at home in the
world, sons and daughters of one Father
who live in the liberty of the children of
God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*



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Week 2: The Historical Roots of Racism

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PRE-WORK:

Please choose to either read, watch, or listen to one of these resources (you can do all three if you'd like). Please take a look at the reflection question prior to your group meeting.

- **Read:** *"Sociologist Andrew Whitehead: How Christian nationalism drives American politics", Paul Rosenberg, Salon*
- **Watch:** *Holy Past- Race in America (Writer of Veggie Tales aka Bob the Tomato)*
- **Listen:** *"The 1619 Project" (Episode 1): The Fight for a True Democracy*

- **Reflection Question & Journal:**

1 Corinthians 12:12-13:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Q. What did you learn about race and racism growing up? Where did you learn about it? Was it at school, or with your family, or possibly Church? Did these institutions talk about it, if so or not, how did that make you feel?



GROUP DISCUSSION:

- **Opening Prayer** (2 minutes)
- **Set the Tone** (2–5 minutes)
 - Reminder of the Grounding Virtues
- **Reflection question** (10–15 minutes)
 - What resonated from this week's Read. Watch. Listen?
- **Sharing time** (20–30 minutes)
 - What did you learn about race and racism growing up? Where did you learn about it? Was it at school, or with your family, or possibly Church? Did these institutions talk about it, if so or not, how did that make you feel?



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Week 2: The Historical Roots of Racism

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- **FAPC Courageous Conversations video** (10–15 minutes)
 - Watch *Jessica's Courageous Conversation* together
 - What surprised or intrigued you from the Courageous Conversation video with Jessica?
- **Going Forward** (5–10 minutes)
 - What will you (personally, or as a group) take home from this conversation?
- **Closing Prayer** (2 minutes)
 - *O God,
you created all people in your image.
We thank you for the astonishing variety
of races and cultures in this world.
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of friendship,
and show us your presence
in those who differ most from us,
until our knowledge of your love is made perfect
in our love for all your children;
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*



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Week 3: How Does Change Happen?

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Pre-work:

- **Read:** *Presbyterian Mission's Matthew 25 Initiative*
- **Watch:** *What is Justice?*
- **Listen:** *FAPC Crossroads Podcast- Hannah Bell and Salomé Noufele*

• **Reflection Question & Journal:**

Isaiah 11:6-9

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.*

*The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.*

*They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;*

*for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.*

Q. What does the Kingdom of God look like to you?



GROUP DISCUSSION:

- **Opening Prayer** (2 minutes)
- **Set the Tone** (2–5 minutes)
 - Reminder of the Grounding Virtues
- **Reflection question** (10–15 minutes)
 - What resonated from this week's Read. Watch. Listen?
- **Sharing time** (20–30 minutes)
 - What was the demographic (socially, economically, and racially) makeup of the community (school, church, city—whatever you define as your community)?



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Week 3: How Does Change Happen?

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- What is that demographic of the community you live in now?
- What does the Kingdom of God look like to you?
- How does your image of the Kingdom of God compare with the community you live in now, and what are ways that God is working in your community (maybe through you) to look more like the Kingdom of God?
- **FAPC Courageous Conversations** video (10–15 minutes)
 - Watch *Eric's Courageous Conversation* together
 - What surprised or intrigued you from the Courageous Conversation video with Eric?
- **Going Forward** (5–10 minutes)
 - What will you (personally, or as a group) take home from this conversation?
- **Closing Prayer** (2 minutes)
 - *Good and Gracious God*
We know you are the God who loves us
We know the best way we can show you we love you
is by loving our neighbor
We want our world to be a just one
So we come to you because we know you are a just God
Please, show us how to love in a radically selfless way
that includes our hearts, souls, and minds.
We want to be passionate and educated and justice oriented as we love.
We are grateful that your heart breaks with ours
as we view the racism and injustice in our world.
Continue to keep our hearts soft so that we pay attention
and repent from our own participation in injustice.
Amen.



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Week 4: Where Do We Go From Here?

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PRE-WORK:

- **Read:** *"Reckoning with the racist history of American Christianity", Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Faith an Leadership"*
- **Watch:** *The Difference Between Being Not Racist and Anti-Racist*
- **Listen:** *On Being: "Robin DiAngelo and Resmaa Menakem In Conversation"*

- **Meditate & Journal:**

1 John 1:5:10

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us

Q. When and how have you benefited from systematic racism?



GROUP DISCUSSION:

- **Opening Prayer** (2 minutes)
- **Set the Tone** (2–5 minutes)
 - Reminder of the Grounding Virtues
- **Reflection question** (10–15 minutes)
 - What resonated from this week's Read.Watch.Listen?
- **Sharing time** (20–30 minutes)
 - What sins of the nation around racism do we need to confess?
 - What personal confessions around race do you need to confess (reminder that this is a safe place)?
- **FAPC Courageous Conversations video** (10–15 minutes)
 - Watch *Jaime's Courageous Conversation* video together



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Week 4: Where Do We Go From Here?

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- What surprised or intrigued you from the Courageous Conversation video with Jamie?
- **Going Forward** (5–10 minutes)
 - What will you (personally, or as a group) take home from this conversation?
- **What would you like to see happen next?**
- **Closing Prayer** (2 minutes)
 - *Gracious and loving God, we come before you today filled with gratitude for your immeasurable love for us, your children. How blessed we are to know that you love us unconditionally, and that there is nothing that we can do that will make you love us any more or any less. And your desire is that we love one another as you have loved us.*
As we have been learning, we have fallen very short of this calling, both as a society and as individuals, especially in relation to people of color. We lament the systemic oppression and racism that people of color. We repent of our implicit biases, and of the racist systems and structures that we, knowingly and unknowingly, have supported and fortified. We seek to dismantle them, and to help build a society where every human being, created, as we are, in your image, can flourish and thrive.
Amen.

Additional Resources

READ

- *"It's not just the coronavirus – bad theology is killing us", William H. Lamar IV, Faith & Leadership*
- *"The Debate Over Systemic Racism: Why It Divides and Why it Provides Hope", Gerald F. Seib, WSJ*
- *"Dismantling Racism – History of the Race Construct"*
- *"The White Problem," Quinn Norton*
- *"How White People Got Made," Quinn Norton*
- *A Christian Call for Reparations, by Kelly Brown Douglas, Sojourners, July 2020*

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WATCH

- *Austin Channing Brown - The Double Sided Pursuit of Racial Justice*
- *Seeing Color - Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man w/ Matthew McConaughey*
- *What it takes to be racially literate - TedWomen 2017*
- *The Origin of Race in the USA*
- *The Racist Origins of US Law*
- *Don't Lose Heart: Why It's Worth It to Fight for Racial Harmony Even When We Don't See Progress*

LISTEN

- *"The 1619 Project" (Episode 2): The Economy That Slavery Built*
- *"The R Word: Racism and Organizational Culture w/Jen Willsea*
- *"Nice White Parents"*
- *"Love in Action" A Conversation with John Lewis*
- *Brene Brown with Austin Channing Brown*
- *The Soul of Nation with Jim Wallis: How Racism Lives in the DNA of White Christianity in America*