



***A Mighty Stream* DISCUSSION GUIDE on Race and Racial Equity: The Work Starts Within**

A Mighty Stream (AMS) is a program that aims to organize and unite Cincinnati's diverse communities of faith into a moral force to act in ways that will remediate race-based systemic inequities wherever they occur. This document accompanies the commitment each faith community made to racial equity work when joining AMS, especially the first resolution: to "discern our personal and communal biases." We believe that central, ongoing part of anti-racism work is the time and vulnerability to reflect on our individual and communal biases, shortcomings, and history. It is only through this continual discernment that we can show up most effectively to our anti-racism commitments. We believe this is not a box we check, but a continual process of reflection and conversation as we strengthen our commitment to each other.

This discussion guide is designed to help any religious community enter the conversation of anti-racism through personal and communal reflection. It is a starting point to help uncover themes and topics for further exploration.

Our suggestion for how to use this guide: We would advise that you gather together a small (5-10 people) group of professional staff, clergy, and lay leaders for an initial 60-90 minute conversation. This conversation, based around the discussion questions below, can then lead to other discussions with a wider group, opportunities for further learning, and taskforces to begin making changes to internal practices and policies.

Introduction Question

1. Introduce you or your families' commitment to your congregation/denomination/faith. If you know, why/when did you or your family first affiliate with this denomination? What led you to join and participate in this specific congregation or community?

Questions around race and racism

2. What is your congregation's racial makeup? This is not a judgement, but an opportunity to be analytical about the racial diversity that does or does not exist in your space.

- a. What are the internal and external factors that could contribute to this? (Is there a congregation with the opposite racial makeup of the same denomination nearby? Do you know how racially diverse your faith tradition is in the entire US?)
- b. NOTE: one way that racism unintentionally enters this conversation is by deflecting responsibility for the lack of diversity from white leadership to congregants of color (i.e. “we are welcoming, they just don’t want to join.”). If this thought or statement arises, name it, call it out, and take the opportunity to dig into how you feel you are welcoming, and if your current actions are sufficient.
3. What is the history of racial diversity in your faith tradition? Was race or slavery a factor in splitting your faith tradition or how it grew and developed in the US historically?
4. How do your faith tradition’s scriptures, tenets, practices, contemporary writings and/or beliefs call you individually or collectively to enter racial justice work?
5. How do we demonstrate that we seek to be an inclusive, diverse, and multiracial community today?
 - a. Are these efforts successful or not? What can we do to make them more successful?
6. What kinds of relationships do we have with other congregations in our city? What is their racial makeup? Why are they the congregations we work with the most?

Some immediate practices to consider for building a more racially inclusive community:

- 1. Standardize ushering or greeting practices:**
 - a. If your community has ushers or greeters, train them on how to greet every individual the same way, without making assumptions about why they are there.
 - b. If there is information that non-regular attendees need to understand the worship or feel welcome, consider placing them in every book or pew, or on the walls or signs near the entrance. This way, no one has to make a judgement about who needs this information and who does not.
- 2. Make race a regularly occurring topic, both from the pulpit and in education spaces.**
 - a. Speaking about race regularly, especially outside of when it dominates national headlines, indicates a willingness to confront these important topics. Preaching about them from the pulpit is also different from adult education opportunities, which are more opt in and do not carry the same weight of message as preaching to the entire community.
- 3. Build a relationship with your national movement around racial diversity.**
 - a. Many faith traditions have a national body, either formal or informal, that probably has resources on how race uniquely can be addressed within your faith tradition. Refer to the race education resources page to see if you can connect with the appropriate programs.
- 4. Review all visual promotional and educational material for racial diversity.**
 - a. If your community has a library or uses youth education books with images, are there any images of people who are not white? What races are the main characters, or individuals in the pews? Do not portray yourself as more diverse than you are, but also

consider the experience of someone who is considering whether or not their identity and experience will be reflected in your community.

5. Become an active participant in *A Mighty Stream*, including the education series and sacred activism alerts.

- a. Take advantage of AMS' educational resources (webinars, glossary of racial justice terms, listing of national and local racial justice programs):
<https://www.equasion.org/a-mighty-stream-an-interfaith-initiative-for-racial-justice/>
- b. We highly recommend that you recruit members of your faith community to serve as a social action team that responds to AMS' programs and sacred activism alerts.

[Acknowledgement: the foregoing piece was authored by Aaron Torop, a rabbinic student at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion while serving as an intern for the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati. We are grateful for his excellent work. – AMS.]

Some assumptions when engaging in diversity encounters ...

- Acquiring cultural awareness and competence is a lifelong learning process.
- All human beings, saints and well as sinners, have prejudices and implicit biases.
- There is tremendous power in the “process of inquiry” – asking someone to advise you on what is appropriate in their culture when done with compassion and a genuine interest in learning.
- We tend to interpret the world from the standpoint of the world we've experienced – the sum of our intercultural experiences forming our frame of reference or the “lens” through which we view groups of people.
- Our group memberships (e.g., race, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, socio-economic status) influence who we are, but do not delimit or predetermine our potential.
- Racism, while a uniquely devastating form of discrimination, is best understood in the universal context of what experts call the “fabric of oppression:” the theory related to the perpetuation of inherited privilege, power, and wealth.
- Race relations should be discussed free of blame and shame, but with openness and personal integrity (e.g., using “I” statements).
- No one represents or speaks for an entire race, religion, culture, or ethnic group, only from personal experience.
- Persons of the same race can have authentic and meaningful conversations on the subject of race. So-called affinity or caucus groups offer valuable learning opportunities.
- As with any relationship, cross-cultural relationships take time, patience, effort, humility, compassion, trial and error, empathy, a genuine respect for human differences, and a commitment to making the relationship work.

Rights, Risks and Responsibilities of Dialogue ...

Dialogue is a process through which people share openly and honestly their views, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about a subject. **The goal of *dialogue* is both simple and complex: to deepen and widen our understanding of ourselves and the other people with whom we are in *dialogue*.**

Genuine *dialogue* implies the possibility of being changed by the experience; therefore, *dialogue* is inherently risky. For true *dialogue* to occur, participants must have a safe environment of mutually accepted rights and responsibilities. These rights and responsibilities are rooted in two fundamental values: respect for the human person and trust in the benefits of *dialogue*.

We believe that true *dialogue* can occur when all participants honor the following rights and responsibilities:

RIGHTS

Each person has the right to express his or her beliefs, ideas, and feelings.

Each person has the right to define him or herself without being labeled by others.

Each person has the right to ask questions to help him or her understand what someone says.

Each person has the right not to change or be forced to change.

Each person has the right to ask others to hold what he or she says in confidence.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Each person has a responsibility to listen to others patiently and without judgment.

Each person has a responsibility not to make untested assumptions about others.

Each person has a responsibility to answer questions in ways that help others understand him or her.

Each person has a responsibility to grant basic human respect to others, even in times of disagreement.

Each person has a responsibility to evaluate his or her own values and attitudes.

JOINT RESPONSIBILITY: To respect and hold in confidence the ideas, beliefs and perspectives shared by each group member during the process of *dialogue*.



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