

**SACRED CONVERSATION ON RACE RESOLUTION
for Penn Central Conference's June 2010 Annual Meeting**

PRESENTERS:

Sacred Conversation on Race Ministry Team

SUMMARY:

To acknowledge that racism is present and is contrary to the Kingdom of God among us.

ADDENDUM:

1. "Words To Know and Understand" provides a basis of definitions for this resolution and for our own sacred conversations on race.
2. "Resources and Recommendations" offers a list of visual resources and print materials for further background information and educational tools.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The roots of the United Church of Christ include events and activists and movements that have been both racist and anti-racist, a rich history that the UCC has acknowledged in many forms, and the work of anti-racism continues within our denomination. In 1963, for example, the Fourth General Synod called upon the United Church of Christ to be "radically committed" to "uproot intolerance, bigotry, and prejudice within our own living and to replace them with goodwill and the determination to strike down immediately the barriers which divide [people] on account of race." During the Twenty-fourth General Synod, a resolution "Calling the United Church of Christ to be an Anti-racist Church" was adopted.

The denomination's concerns regarding racism have long been shared by Penn Central Conference. In 1993, the Penn Central Conference passed two resolutions, "Steps Toward Eliminating Racism" and "Promoting Equality, Diversity, and Nonviolence." In 1998, the theme of Penn Central Conference's Annual Meeting was "A Church Inclusive of All People – Dismantling Racism," which included presentations on the language of racism, white privilege, and building new community. In 1999, an Anti-Racism Task Force was formed to continue the Conference's efforts to address these concerns.

In May of 2008, the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, the Rev. John Thomas, called for our denomination to begin a “Sacred Conversation on Race” in our churches. As a direct result, the Penn Central Conference extended an invitation throughout the Conference for a Sacred Conversation meeting in the summer of 2008; ultimately, the Sacred Conversation on Race (SCOR) Ministry Team was formed.

The SCOR Ministry Team members commonly acknowledge that personal experiences of race and racism have impacted (and continue to inform) the team members' Christian faith, their perspectives on the Body of Christ, and their social justice commitments. Emphasizing the importance of conversation in the work of anti-racism, the Ministry Team facilitated an opportunity for Penn Central Conference congregations to begin their own sacred conversations using *The Anti-Racist Cookbook* by Robin Parker and Pamela Smith Chambers, as well as educational and conversational opportunities at the Conference's Annual Meeting in June 2009.

BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL PREMISE:

In the book of Genesis (1:27), we are called to recognize that all humanity has been created equally in the image of God; this great diversity has been created, blessed and affirmed by God (1:28, 31). Yet across the generations, human beings have twisted God's gift of diversity into a basis for hostility and disparity, often erecting and maintaining barriers that enforce injustice due to difference.

God came into the world in the person and being of Jesus Christ; through Christ, God has shared our common lot. In his saving work, Jesus scandalized people by breaking social barriers: associating with the hated Samaritan, the Roman oppressor, and the Syro-Phoenician outsider. His call to follow him includes this barrier-breaking work, for “he is our peace; in his flesh he has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Ephesians 2:14).

Reconciliation with God is linked essentially to reconciliation with one another, and we share in the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us (2 Corinthians 6:18). Listening to one another, we seek to hear God speaking, revealing truths about ourselves and others, and truths about structures of injustice in our society. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow God's call: “Putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25). Through all, Jesus calls us to love God with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31).

WHEREAS, racism still exists and is visible in many forms today, as evidenced by unjust social and economic disparity among ethnic and cultural groups in society and by the perpetuation of the practice of classifying people by the concept of “race” to be seen as biologically different or inferior within the so-called norm and dominance of white Euro-American culture;

WHEREAS we, as the Penn Central Conference, have previously held conversations on race—sometimes with celebration and accord, sometimes with difficulty and disagreement—yet our conversations are not “finished” simply because we have talked about race once or twice; and

WHEREAS our Penn Central Conference congregations are located in communities that are increasingly racially diverse, posing both a challenge to and an opportunity for our congregations to be inclusive and multi-cultural; many members of our churches are frightened by such change and are uncertain of methods of engagement and celebration;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that we, as the Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ, acknowledge that racism is present, that racism mocks the Gospel, and that racism is contrary to the Kingdom of God among us.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we, as Penn Central Conference, continue to seek, promote, and develop ongoing opportunities for the education and mutual celebration of diverse histories, experiences, cultures, and spiritual gifts of all people.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we, as the Penn Central Conference, in all of its settings—members, congregations, Associations, and Conference—engage in sacred conversations on race in order to learn to identify racism in systems around us, and commit to understanding and eliminating racism within ourselves, our interactions, and our congregations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we—as individuals, congregations, and Associations within the Penn Central Conference—work to recognize, resist and eradicate racism in our respective communities; and that we work to bring down barriers of race, seeking instead to actively build bridges of peace, mutual respect, and understanding so that all may indeed be one (John 17:21).

**ADDENDUM: SACRED CONVERSATION ON RACE RESOLUTION
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1. WORDS TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND:

RACE: To borrow the title of a PBS documentary, race is an illusion.¹ It's a idea constructed to explain human differences. People have argued for eons over differences of tribe, culture, land, ethnicity, and religion. Explanations of racial difference first arose in the 17th century, with the clear goal of defining a superior and normative culture, intelligence, and measure of beauty. By the 19th century, the theories of philosophers and scientists were used to defend the oppression of “darker” races. Consequently, although race is an illusion, the impact of race is very real.

RACISM: Racism is different from prejudice (see below); racism is a system of practices that create and maintain a hierarchy within social structures based on race. White racism points to the particular enabling of white persons to maintain systems of power over persons of color (Black, Latino/a, Asian American, Arab American, Native American, etc.). Racism rarely works alone; it utilizes categories of gender, class, sexual orientation, nationalism, et al. to maintain systems of dominance.

PREJUDICE: Prejudice describes individual and interpersonal bias based on broad assumptions.

DISCRIMINATION: While prejudice is cognitive (what you think about others), discrimination is active; it is the unequal treatment of others based on prejudice, either by an individual, an institution, or a society. **RACIAL DISCRIMINATION** identifies specific action(s) based on racial prejudice; racism is the system of power that is created and perpetuated by those acts of discrimination.

COLOR-BLIND: It's appealing, especially for whites, to respond to racism by claiming color-blindness, that is, an ability to not see “color” or race. Those who study race and racism, however, observe that color-blindness usually turns a blind eye toward the systems of racism in society and avoids seeing the impact of racism on a friend or neighbor's daily life.

WHITE GUILT: For white people, understanding the history of race relations and learning to see racism in society around them can lead to feelings of guilt for being part of the oppressing/benefiting culture. It's actually important for white people to feel and acknowledge white guilt...but not to wallow there.

ANTI-RACISM: Anti-racism indicates the proactive work to challenge systems (not just prejudices) that degrade racial differences and oppress non-whites.

ETHNICITY: Different than race, ethnicity identifies a cultural group by shared language and heritage.

¹ *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. California Newsreel. Available at www.pbs.org/race.

2. RESOURCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS (an abridged list):

VISUAL RESOURCES

The Color of Fear. StirFry Seminars, www.stirfryseminars.com.

Myth of Race. Mennonite Central Committee.

Race: The Power of an Illusion. California Newsreel; available at www.pbs.org/race.

Something the Lord Made. HBO Films.

A Time for Burning. Lutheran Film Associates, www.lutheranfilm.org.

Traces of the Trade. www.tracesofthetrade.org.

What Makes Me White. By A. M. Sands. whatmakesmewhite.com.

PRINTED RESOURCES

Anti-Racist Cookbook, The: A Recipe Guide for Conversations about Race That Goes Beyond Covered Dishes and “Kum-Bah-Ya.” Robin Parker & Pamela Smith Chambers. (Crandall, Dostie & Douglass Books, Inc. 2005)

Bias and Pious: The Relationship Between Prejudice and Religion. James E. Dittes. (Augsburg Press 2003)

A Child Is Born. Margaret Wise Brown, with illustrations by Floyd Cooper. (Hyperion Books 2003)

Colors Come from God...Just Like Me! Carolyn A. Forché. (Abingdon Press 1995)

Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery. Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jenifer Frank. (Ballantine Books 2006)

Fulfilling the Dream: Confronting the Challenge of Racism. Ronice E. Branding. (Chalice Press 1998)

Inclusion: Making Room for Grace. Eric. H. F. Law. (Chalice Press 2000)

One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches. George Yancey. (InterVarsity Press 2003)

Strength to Love. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Augsburg Fortress 1981)

Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism. James Loewen. (Touchstone 2006)