

Witnessing Whiteness AWARE Small Groups: Getting Started

*But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!
~ Amos 5:24 (NIV)*

Introduction

Shelly Tochluk, author of *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It*, visited the [Western Pennsylvania Conference](#) to facilitate conversations about race among church leaders and those involved in anti-racism work. Out of that visit, a small group of laity and clergy in the Washington District began an on-going study focusing on anti-racism, inclusion, and white privilege based on Tochluk's online curriculum. Members of that group learned much during their time together and offer the following advice for those interested in launching their own groups. Here are some of their suggestions:

Reading

- [Tochluk's *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It*](#)
- [Small Group Curriculum](#)

Scripture

Though the *Witnessing Whiteness* small group curriculum is secular, it is still useful in the church setting to help develop cultural competencies in anti-racism, inclusion, and white privilege. To help give the curriculum biblical context, consider the following scripture to complement each chapter:

- Chapter 1: Isaiah 35:1-6a
- Chapter 2: Genesis 11:1-9, Philippians 4:4-9
- Chapter 3: Galatians 6:11-16
- Chapter 4: Philippians 2:1-11
- Chapter 5: Galatians 3:28
- Chapter 6: Ruth 2:10-13
- Chapter 7: Mark 9:33-37
- Chapter 8: Luke 10:38-42 (focus not fussing)
- Chapter 9: Galatians 6:1-6

Tips for Doing a Group

- Purchase *Witnessing Whiteness* books far in advance so participants can read the book in its entirety prior to the first meeting of the small group

- Be aware that Tochluk’s book and curriculum are secular so look to the scripture provided here and be sensitive to drawing on additional scripture, theology, and prayers
- Develop “ground rules” or a covenant (See [“Creating a Safe Space” in Group Structure, Process, and Communication Guidelines](#))
- Plan for 7-9 sessions to thoroughly work through the material and establish solid group rapport
- Cap the group at 14 people to encourage intimacy and conversation
- Clearly state and share the goal(s) with the group (See [“Goals of Series”](#) at [“Workshop Series Overview”](#))
- The group may be a diverse one or just comprised of whites--the benefit of the latter is that whites do the work rather than relying on people of color for the answers
- Individual or rotated facilitation
- Choose a room size that allows for small group breakouts
- Encourage participants to take the [Myers Brigg Personality Test](#) (cost is \$49; search online for free alternatives)
- Suggested Activities:
 - [Power Shuffle or Privilege Walk/Cross the Line](#): People of color could be invited once to visit a group comprised of whites for visual/emotional impact.
 - Racial Rorschach Test - each participant gets sheets of blank paper and instruction to write down what comes to mind when the facilitator says: 1. Asian and Pacific Islander, 2. Hispanic or Latina/o, 3. American Indian, 4. Arab-American, 5. African American, and 6. White. From Wesley Granbeg-Michaleson, “Stealing Jesus,” *Christian Century* (July 20, 2016) .
 - Include a time for reflection and processing for each session
- Regroup about two weeks after the study for a casual gathering (coffee perhaps)

Evaluation

Evaluation is critical to assessing learning--reflecting on successes and challenges internal to the group and sharing--by documenting feedback to improve future groups. Consider using this assessment tool at the end of the small group:

**Witnessing Whiteness AWARE Small Group
Evaluation Form**

Name of Group _____

Location (City/Town and State): _____

Small Group Goals

At the end of the small group, I am able to:

1	Notice and respond to interpersonal, institutional, and cultural racism	Yes No
2	Explore my personal relationship to people of color	Yes No
3	Improve relationships and collaboration across racial/ethnic lines to support social justice efforts	Yes No
4		Yes No
5		Yes No

Presenter Evaluation:

Please circle the number that best describes the facilitators
(1= poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=very good)

Name of facilitator(s):

	1	2	3	4
	1	2	3	4
	1	2	3	4

Knowledge of material	1	2	3	4
Presentation of material	1	2	3	4
Usefulness of material	1	2	3	4
Willingness to answer questions	1	2	3	4

Program Evaluation

The content was relevant to the goals	1	2	3	4
Effectiveness of teaching methods	1	2	3	4

Logistics

Size of room	1	2	3	4
Comfort of room	1	2	3	4
Hospitality including food	1	2	3	4

Overall Ratings	1	2	3	4
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How do you anticipate the small group impacting your ministry as a lay person or clergy?

Suggestions for the next event or small group:

Upcoming anti-racism events and groups . . .

Testimonies

It was through reading *Witnessing Whiteness* and participating in the activities that I came to realize: how my whiteness affords me advantages, how the impact of my words and actions can be offensive to people of color, how my perceptions of color have been negatively affected by media coverage causing me fear and prejudice, and how my isolation and my “not paying attention” kept me from loving as I am commanded. (*Love ... doesn't seek its own advantage ... it isn't happy with injustice.* 1 Cor. 13:6, CEB) And this recognition, this personal form of witnessing whiteness, was a first step on my transformative journey.

~Linda Stewart, laity

For me, I had to participate in the Witnessing Whiteness Study. I have been nagged by the Holy Spirit and had to say “yes.” I could not have imagined or hoped for what the study sessions and reading the book have done to my life. Through the study, I learned a great deal about institutional racism and white privilege which I had already believed I knew so much about. I am still amazed, months later, at the impact the information and the group rapport are making. I view the world with slightly different lens. These lens now give me the sight to see racism, and people. (This sounds like the Holy Spirit working in me.) I see value in people that agree and disagree with me. I see racism through the lens of hope for a world that Jesus has commissioned us toward. I still get really bitter and frustrated by the prejudice, disparities, and white privilege that exists, but I am honestly a little bit softer around the edges because of the Witnessing Whiteness study. That softer edge is awareness and tools that are now a permanent part of who I choose to be. Songwriter Jordan Feliz wrote the song, *The River*. Here are some of the lyrics: “...Let’s go down, down, down to the river; You will leave changed; Let’s go down, down, down to the river; Never the same...” I left the Witnessing Whiteness study changed and thank God I will never be the same.

~ Dawn Hargraves, pastor

“Witnessing Whiteness” was a step forward toward recognizing my role in the racial tensions of today. The class was a “safe” place to study and explore the meaning of racism, to bounce ideas off of other people who were searching as well, and to begin the struggle to end racism. I’m still in that struggle. I live in a white world, where my contact with people of color typically is very safe and sterile. I recognize that I still hold on to vestiges of racism because of experiences like watching a family of color at a restaurant and thinking that them being “together” was exceptional (much like Wendy Bell’s recognition of the black busboy in a South Side restaurant). I don’t harbor any real hatred of color. Indeed, I have fallen in love with the people of Haiti (who are black). Their faith and their joy are inspirational to me. I know that I am not a “savior,” but I want

to help. I also have a daughter-in-law who is Hispanic, and a grand-daughter. The course pushed me over the edge to begin learning Spanish, so that I could enter their world and not just expect them to live in mine. What else will happen now? I'm not sure. I want to help organize another class to help others identify the issue for themselves. I intend to try to look from different perspectives when racial issues arise, and speak out when necessary.

~ Bill Starr, pastor

As I ponder what to share about the witnessing whiteness exercise I participated in during Lay Servant Ministry school, I have mixed emotions and mixed thoughts. I know in my heart of hearts that I want to be as open to the Spirit of God as possible, but I know I hold back. Is that good? Sometimes it is. But I did not enter into this exercise seeking transformation. No, I am not transformed yet, but am still on my way to perfection and being truly transformed by Jesus. But I came away with an understanding that until we can look at Jesus and know He may be the only commonality we share and that we can disagree, we will never overcome racism, sexism, or any ism. My experience here confirmed that not everyone is heard. And that was confirmed even before the sessions began. In fact, I almost did not participate because of that. I know racism exists and it is not an easy task to face, acknowledge, repent that I commit that sin or eradicate in my lifetime. What I do know is that I will make every attempt to listen and acknowledge the person I am engaged with. I don't have to agree with that person. But I must respect that person for loving Jesus and being willing, as I am, to be vulnerable. I will continue to speak against racism. But I am also continuing to see every person as a valuable agent of God, whether I like what they say or how it is said, or not. I am not perfect by any means. I think we need to continue the task of dialogue and prayer and examination of this heinous sin called racism. But in the process we must not silence those we disagree with as they too have something worthwhile to say.

~ Deb Rogosky, pastor

Contact the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church -- Office of Diversity Development and Inclusion at diversity@wpaumc.org or 724-776-2300 with any questions.