



How to Have Conversations about Race July 27, 2020

Dear friends,

We humans are built for community. During this time of social distancing, it's crucial that we remain connected, holding one another in love and support. It's for this reason that **each week during the COVID-19 crisis, we'll be sending you a short resource** to use in a virtual meeting held over the phone or via video conferencing. This weekly resource is a great tool to stay connected with your current and past JFM small groups. It is also a great resource to use individually, or with groups of friends or family to stay connected and engaged in a meaningful way. These reflections will provide a time to pray together, check in with one another, and have conversation around a short passage.

In the meantime, we're offering tips and tools for facilitating all of our current programs through videoconferencing. While we hope that this weekly resource will spiritually sustain your community while in quarantine, [now is also the perfect time to start one of our regular programs](#). The call to seek justice is just as important now as ever!

Last but not least, generosity is, at its core, a benefit to everyone. When you donate today, your gift helps us sustain individuals committed to making the world better. [Click here to help out](#). Also, please feel free to [forward this resource](#) to friends and family!

Thank you for continuing to care for one another during this time of heightened anxiety. Know that we are praying for you!

Stay well,

The JustFaith Ministries Staff



Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

When everyone has dialed in, begin your time together with these or similar words:

Welcome, friends! It's so good to be with all of you, despite that we can't be together in person. Today we'll begin with prayer and spend a few minutes checking in with each other. Then we'll have some conversation around a short reflection before closing in prayer. Most importantly, though, this will be a time to care for one another and to be the community we're called to be.

Let's take a few seconds of silence to pause, to listen to our breathing, and to be present in this space.

Pause for 30 seconds before beginning the opening prayer.

Introduce the prayer with the following words: We will now read "A Litany for Those not Ready for Healing" by Dr. Yolanda Pierce. Dr. Pierce is the Dean of Howard Divinity School and a professor of African American Religion and Literature.

A Litany for Those not Ready for Healing By Dr. Yolanda Pierce (used with permission)

Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Let us not rush to offer a bandaid, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.

Let us not offer false equivalencies, thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance in a particular historical moment.

Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.

Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child...someone's beloved son.

Let us not value property over people; let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.



Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice.

Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together.

Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts are being torn asunder.

Instead...

Let us mourn black and brown men and women, those killed extrajudicially every 28 hours.

Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer who described him as a demon.

Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.

Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease, and sit in the ashes of this nation's original sin.

Let us be silent when we don't know what to say.

Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage, and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbors and friends.

Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase.

Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground

Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.

God, in your mercy...

Show me my own complicity in injustice.
Convict me for my indifference.
Forgive me when I have remained silent.
Equip me with a zeal for righteousness.



Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness.
Amen.

Let participants know that if they would like to know more about Dr. Pierce's work for racial justice, they can visit her website, yolandapierce.com.

Check-In Time (10 minutes or so)

Ask these open-ended questions. If you're by yourself, journal about them.

Note: If you're with a group, these questions have the potential to take up a lot of time. Some weeks may require more check-in time than others, depending on the needs of the group. To provide a shorter yet meaningful check-in time, choose ONE of the questions below, and ask participants to share a ONE sentence response.

- **Before we begin this week's reflection, let's take a few minutes to check in. How is everyone feeling?** (It will be a bit more difficult via phone to know if someone is being talked over or is trying to get a word in.... Be sure everyone has a chance to speak).
- **What is something you're struggling with this week?**
- **Where have you seen a sign of hope this week?**

Other optional questions include: What is something you've learned about yourself during this time of social distancing? Where have you experienced a "thin place" in the last week? Where have you seen beauty this week? What is one new behavior you'd like to continue doing when the virus has passed us by?

Reflection (30 minutes or so)

Read aloud the JustFaith Ministries newsletter blog, or send it out via email for participants to read ahead of time. Access the blog [by clicking here](#).

Then ask participants:



- Which, if any, of these suggestions do you find particularly helpful? Do you have any suggestions you'd like to add to the list?
- Can you think of a time when a conversation with someone opened your eyes to a new way of seeing the world? If so, what techniques can you learn from this conversation partner?
- Can you think of a time when you had a conversation about race, or another justice-related issue, that did *not* go well? What might you do differently next time?
- Choose from any of the following scenarios and discuss ways to most effectively respond. Feel free to adapt the scenarios to situations that are most relevant to your group. **However, do not repeat the racist jokes or statements themselves, even in the context of this exercise** (this could be extremely hurtful, *especially* if there are people of color in your group).
 - You are in a meeting at work, and your boss makes a racist statement about a particular group of people. She does not seem to realize that her assumption is untrue and hurtful. What do you do?
 - Even after talking with your boss and expressing your concerns, she continues to make racist statements. What do you do?
 - You are watching a football game with a group of friends, when one friend makes a racist joke. Others laugh uncomfortably, but no one speaks up. How do you respond?
 - Your cousin, who you occasionally see at family gatherings but with whom you do not have a strong relationship, posts a picture of the confederate flag on social media and expresses his pride for his southern heritage. Do you respond? How?
 - Your priest or pastor makes a racist remark in his homily. What do you do?
 - Your friend is a teacher, and she expresses hurtful stereotypes about her students of color and their families. You are not a teacher and don't know everything about her day-to-day struggles, especially during this time of COVID. But you do know that her beliefs are likely causing her students harm. Do you approach her about this issue? If so, how?

Announcements (10 minutes-ish)

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- Remind participants that today's conversation offered only a brief insight into a huge topic. If they would like to take a deeper dive into this subject matter, they should consider taking one of JustFaith Ministries' eight-session [programs on racism and racial justice](#).
 - Say to participants: *"Today, more than ever, your financial support is helping create a more just and compassionate world by sustaining people of faith through the JustFaith Network. [Your donation](#) helps extend hope by ensuring that these resources are available during these hard times. We also invite (and encourage) you to share this resource with friends and family!"*
 - JustFaith Ministries is currently hosting a monthly webinar series called "Acting for Justice While Sheltering in Place," in which an expert on a justice-related topic will offer tips for taking action during COVID-19. Visit the [JustFaith Ministries Facebook page](#) for more information for times and topics.
 - The next event will be held on Thursday, August 13th at 7 PM EST, during which Rev. Dr. Kevin Cosby will be speaking on "What We Continue to Get Wrong about Race." *Copy and paste the link in the chat box so that participants can register: <https://www.facebook.com/events/305192873859715>*
 - Are there any opportunities for action or advocacy happening in your community this week? Invite participants to share ways to support the work of local groups working for racial justice.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes-ish)

Then say: Before we join in the closing prayer, let us pause to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is as close as our very breath.

Pause for 30 seconds

Let's pray.

When our minds race with fear,
when televisions blare bad news,
when information and misinformation
whirl around us,



Speak to us, O God,
in the sound that is thin and quiet.

Pause for silence.

Then say: The following prayer was written by Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest and scientists of the early 20th century. This prayer was chosen because, although we are called to speak and act for justice, our efforts can sometimes seem futile. This prayer reminds us that, through God's grace, others will cultivate and harvest the tiny seeds we sow.

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.
And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.
Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ
excerpted from [Hearts on Fire](#)

Then, in these words, invite any participants who have a prayer, a concern, or a request to briefly share it:

We are disciples on a journey.



We are the body of Christ, broken for the world.

We hold one another as we carry the concerns of our neighbors.

If you feel moved, please share your prayer aloud.

Leader: We pray also for the members of the JustFaith community across the country. Unite us through the power of your Holy Spirit, that together we might participate with you in the building of your Kingdom, in order to create a more just and peaceful world. Amen.