

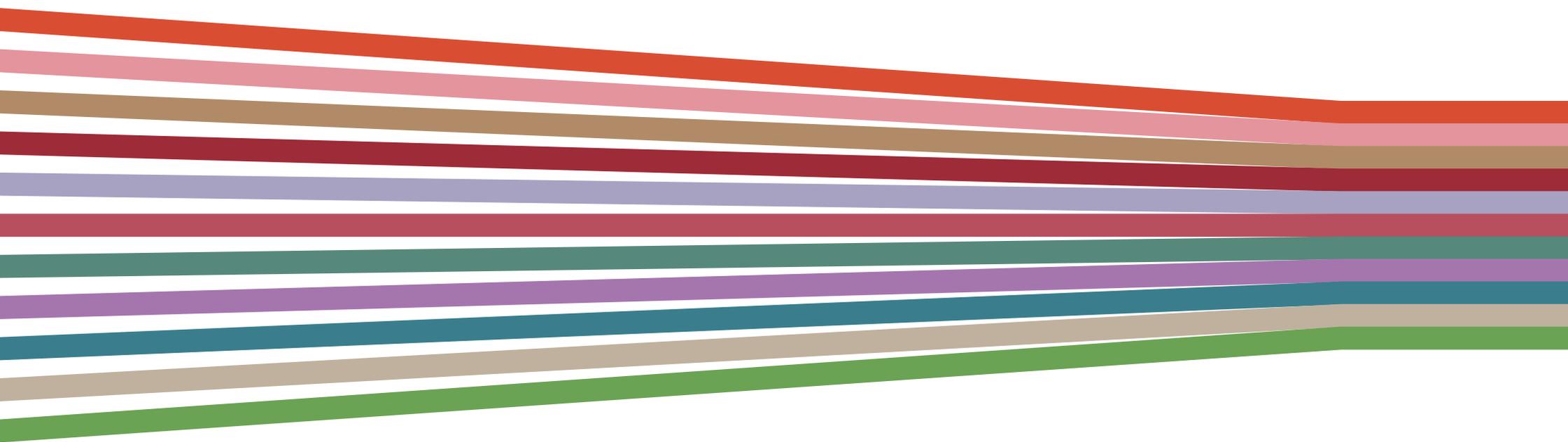


---

## From Every Nation?

---

A Handbook for a congregation's journey  
from welcome to belonging



# Contents

<b>An invitation to wholeness</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Ch 1 What does the Bible say and why act?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Ch 2 The power of lament</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Ch 3 Racism: Not my problem</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Ch 4 Denial and minimising in race</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Ch 5 Worship and belonging</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Ch 6 Language and belonging</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Ch 7 Why inclusion and belonging matters</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Ch 8 Unity or uniformity</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Ch 9 Young people and race</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Ch 10 The song of jubilee</b>	<b>25</b>

# An invitation to wholeness

By the time Jesus was of school age, he had already experienced the slur of being an immigrant as part of a minority culture in a foreign land. This tells us so much about God's heart for those who have experienced the same injustices.

In a society which impetuously demands that we choose single identities and competitive sides, this anti-racism handbook is timely.

An African proverb says, 'if you want to go fast go alone, but if you want to go far go together'. This handbook is the culmination of many years of research. In partnership with VOX Magazine and with the active support of Evangelical Alliance in both Ireland and Northern Ireland during July/August 2021, a survey was conducted on the experiences of people from ethnic minorities in Irish churches, and the attitudes of the majority ethnic group to increasing diversity in their churches and communities.<sup>1</sup> Over 1,000 responses were collected.

90% of respondents believed it was important for churches to engage in conversations about race and racism with 82% agreeing that 'Racism and discrimination are real problems in Ireland/Northern Ireland'. The reality of racism, discrimination, micro-aggressions and inappropriate jokes happening regularly were causes for concern. Stories and examples revealed a range of painful and difficult experiences, as well as joyful encounters and new belongings.

55% of clergy interviewed said that whilst talking about race is not a taboo subject, 'we don't talk about it much'.

The findings from this survey demonstrate our churches still have much work to do to become places of belonging for all who attend them.

We hope this handbook is not simply a guide towards becoming an anti-racist congregation: ultimately, this is an invitation to wholeness.

In a culture that pushes us to accept an 'us vs. them' narrative, Jesus gives us the eyes of faith to see that we are all made in the image of God, where diversity is a gift to be enjoyed. This is the upside down kingdom where the foreigner can claim kingdom birthright as much as those who are native born.

Therefore, we invite you to join with us on this journey:

- to recognise God's active presence in the world,
- to align with God's purposes for this world,
- and to generate hope for the Revelation vision of peoples, tongues and nations worshipping together.

Join us as we lurch expectantly towards this new world vision aching to be born.



Bishop Andrew Forster  
Co-Chair



Bishop Brendan Leahy  
Co-Chair



# Introduction

*'We worship in a congregation that has recently welcomed refugee families ... but I am sure we can do better in welcoming them ...'*

The fabric of congregational life varies from city to town to village. Some congregations have experienced fast multicultural shifts whereas others have experienced very little. Whether you belong to a congregation that reflects one culture or many, becoming a church that is anti-racist should be important. Think of the football team your child or grandchild supports and the diversity present there. Think of how our young people easily cross racial barriers on social media. Think of how young people are plunged into global villages through university experiences. We may not see this diversity present in the one hour of worship on a Sunday morning, yet by cultivating greater awareness of our attitudes towards others, we step into God's ultimate mission of seeing a kingdom of disciples who worship from all nations. Sometimes when we hear or see examples of racism our antennae goes up ... but if it does not directly affect us, we can easily switch off again. The purpose of this book is to raise awareness in such a way that we are not just light switches to racism, that easily switch on and off, but rather smoke detectors, constantly alert to how others experience or do not experience God's love in the world.

## What is Racism?

Racism is the description, in belief, speech or action, of groups as being essentially inferior or superior based on the idea of 'race'. Racism is when systems or decisions favour certain groups over others. No individual discrimination is necessary for that to happen. Racism carries connotations of violence because the dehumanisation of ethnic groups has been historically enforced through violence. Racism is when an individual, group, structure or institution intentionally or unintentionally abuse their power to the detriment of people, because of their actual or perceived 'racialised' background.<sup>2</sup> A simple way to understand racism is in this formula:

racism=prejudice+power

## This handbook should help you in 3 ways:

### 1. To Learn about Racism:

The handbook is written to support a journey for you and your congregation together, learning and questioning, and addressing together the issues which often arise in such common learning experiences. You may find it helpful to share the news of this handbook and accompanying website with your congregation, and then consider discussion opportunities or activities to explore the handbook.

### 2. To Support Discussions:

The handbook is set out in small sections to support a reading of the handbook together with a group over a series of discussions at your own pace. You might find an already enthusiastic champion for this work in your congregation, although we suggest that leadership of any discussion group is shared amongst a few people. Members of clergy should consider allowing this work to be led by lay members. Encouraging feedback into leadership structures and responding through positive decision making and action will enable the congregation to grow together.

Martin Luther King Jr said that 'the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice'. Each section of this book can be used with your leadership team, your young adults group or other focus groups to think more deeply about racism. At the end of each section there are three moments of engagement reflecting Luther King's 'arc':

**A for awareness:** how can we become more aware in our minds about racism and how we break God's law to love God and love our neighbour.

**R for relationships:** how can we intentionally foster relationships across cultural divides and learn to love from the heart.

**C for commitment:** what commitments can we make personally and collectively that move us towards becoming more anti-racist.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. To Identify Actions:

The last section of the handbook has an audit tool which will help you to reflect on where your congregation is on your journey to full inclusion. This should help you as a congregation to transform how you live as a community of faith that rejects racism in all its forms. Clear headings will help you revisit themes later, together with further resources you on the accompanying website.

We encourage you to attend related events beyond your local congregation or organise your own. Many congregations are already working in this area and can offer advice and support on your journey. Reach out to congregations in your tradition as well as to churches of other traditions to explore how you can work together.

### Two questions to get started:

- When and how did you first become aware of cultural groups that were different from your own?
- What has been challenging and what has been rewarding in interacting with people from different cultures?

# What does the Bible say and why act?



### Looking backwards ...

- In God's good creation, life overflowed: water teemed with living creatures, and birds flew across the vault of the sky. Humans were created in God's image to be fruitful and increase in number. It is a picture of abundance, diversity and interconnectedness.
- It was triune God who was involved in creation. The trinity models unity in diversity.
- If we are created after God's likeness, then the way we operate in the world should reflect this likeness.
- The opening of Genesis is a picture of Shalom where all people have enough, families have land and all of creation cooperates in deep mutuality.
- The fall resulted in separation from God and each other where scarcity drove humans towards competition. The tower of Babel illustrates how people wanted to become settled in their own land and make a name for themselves without God. But God came down and scattered the people by confusing their language. Racial and cultural silos generated the possibility of one group wanting to dominate the other.
- God sent Jesus as the suffering servant to reconcile the nations and 'proclaim righteousness to the Gentiles' as much as to the chosen Jewish people. Jesus' work on the cross dismantled divisions to demonstrate all are welcome into God's kingdom family irrespective of gender, culture or race.
- Because of Jesus, cultural markers should not determine who is an insider or an outsider but rather what counts now is our new identity through Christ Jesus.
- This work found its fullest expression on the day of Pentecost when God came down again, this time in the form of the Holy Spirit so that people from different language groups could understand each other again.

### Looking forwards ...

- In the final redemption, ethnic differences will not be erased in the new resurrected bodies but rather 'the glory and honour of the nations will be brought' into the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24, 26). In the New Jerusalem, the shalom of Eden is restored and at the centre of the city is the tree of life whose leaves are 'for the healing of the nations' (Revelation 22:2) embodying the deep healing for all the brokenness that the sin of racism brings.

### Looking to the present ...

- John Stott wrote in his commentary on Acts 'By choosing and blessing the Jews, God intended to bless all the families of the earth in Genesis 12:1-4 ... The tragedy was that Israel twisted this doctrine of election into one of favouritism, because filled with racial pride and hatred, they despised the Gentiles as 'dogs' and developed traditions that kept them apart'.
- We define racism then as: the description, in belief, speech or action, of groups as being essentially inferior or superior based on the idea of 'race'.
- In this moment, even though we are followers of Christ, we can be frustratingly slow to learn how to welcome people who are different. In Acts 10, it took 3 different visions for Peter to realise that God did not show favouritism and it was possible to eat with Cornelius even though it broke all kinds of cultural taboos. Later on, Peter still struggles as Paul challenges him in Galatians 2 for trying to make Gentiles assimilate into Jewish traditions.
- Racism highlights the sinful tendency to devise markers for racial superiority.
- It is significant that when Jesus taught the scholar how to love his neighbour, he deliberately chose the good Samaritan, someone outside of his own kinship culture and tradition to espouse neighbourly love. This exemplified the enormous risks Jesus himself took to love the stranger.
- Racism reflects the timeless problem of groups or individuals devising ways to put down others to protect their own position in society.
- Racism also reflects an amnesia: forgetting that we once were strangers to Jesus when he came to adopt us into his family. That's why littered throughout scripture is the repeated call to welcome the stranger: 'When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not ill-treat them ... Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God' Leviticus 19:33-34.

In our survey, when asked what do you long to see happen in your congregation, someone gave this beautiful response ...

*'Unity through diversity. Becoming a voice for the powerless. Pursuing Shalom and showing what it looks like to delight in each other's cultures and weep when injustice is done'.*

## Awareness:

When we are in a position of privilege, we have the privilege of being able to walk away from problems that don't directly affect us. How would you assess this statement in light of your own position?

- A simple equation for racism is: racism=prejudice+power. Prejudice is when we treat people differently based on the colour of their skin or their cultural preferences and power uses prejudice to ensure others are excluded. What examples can you give of this in your own context?

## Relationships:

- In Acts 10, Peter felt unable to eat with Cornelius until God showed him that it was acceptable. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt uncomfortable sharing space with someone and later on you felt convicted by God about this?

## Commitment:

- When reading the Bible, we automatically see ourselves as the heroes in the story. How might we put Jesus at the centre of our readings and practice gratitude for the extreme lengths he went to, to welcome us into his family? What might a daily practice of gratitude look like?
- 'If you have not learned to lament, you have not learned to love'. Discuss possible ways to incorporate lament personally and corporately into your worship (note the next section gives ideas for this).
- What legislation is being discussed in the news that highlights our welcome of the stranger? What is your biblical response?

## Some Facts about Racism in Ireland

Racism prevents us creating strong relationships in our communities. It stops us getting to know one another, through prejudice, ignorance or anxiety about those we don't know. It keeps our community groups from becoming more diverse, so we think 'that's just the way it is'. To serve God, we have to actively reach out in our communities, and break through the walls that racism creates. Racial injustice is also a key driver of poverty globally and exclusion here on the island of Ireland, and we must seek to restore that dignity to people which has been removed by racism.

The island of Ireland has become increasingly diverse by ethnicity and nationality since the 1990s. The largest ethnic minority populations are in the major cities, but there are people of ethnic minority backgrounds in every town on the island of Ireland.

In the Republic of Ireland, 17% of the population were nationals of other countries (2016 Census). The largest ethnic minority communities in Ireland are from Poland, Lithuania, Nigeria, Romania, Brazil, and the Philippines. Most migrants in Ireland in 2021 were aged between 25-44 and had a 3rd-level qualification, but still face much discrimination and exclusion. Irish Travellers make up 0.7% of the population. Asylum seekers and refugees make up less than 0.2% of the Irish population but are amongst the most excluded, facing significant barriers related to isolation, language barriers, and discrimination.

In Northern Ireland, 6.5% of the population were nationals of other countries, more than half from the EU (2021 Census). Chinese and Indian communities are the largest second and third-generation migrant communities. People of African descent have also been present for decades but in smaller numbers. There are more people of ethnic minority backgrounds in the cities, but no distinct residential segregation. Irish Travellers make up less than 1% of the population. Northern Ireland also has a small population of asylum seekers and refugees from various ethnic groups and nationalities.

600 people in Ireland reported racism to the Irish Network Against Racism in 2022, in neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, healthcare, transport and public offices, as well as repeated harassment and violence.<sup>4</sup> Racism happens in every community across Ireland, but we don't always see it. Learning to recognise racism and support people affected by it is a way of building community with one another, in our churches and beyond. Racism, although context specific, is a problem and racial inequalities are present on a daily basis in our society.

- A society which allows racial discrimination, inequality and exclusion cannot reach its full potential.
- Anti-racism initiatives must focus on long-term culture change and on embedding good practice, not fixing individuals or creating one-off responses.
- Racism is not always overt and can manifest itself in everyday interactions, processes, behaviours, etc. (e.g. microaggressions).
- Racism is not always intended badly, but it always impacts on the person experiencing it.
- Racial inequalities are experienced differently by people from similar and different ethnic backgrounds.

The largest group of discrimination reports came from people of Black African, Black Irish or Black-Other backgrounds at 33%.

# The power of lament



*We also need to develop a more biblical idea of corporate and national repentance for the sins of our people and our ancestors. The radical individualism of the present age allows us to say, 'I'm not personally racist, so everything is fine, and I'm not responsible for whatever privileges I might have accrued in a racist society'.*

'Learning to lament is nothing less than the entering a way of dying to self that is at the very heart of the journey of reconciliation.' Michelle Lloyd Paige in *Diversity Playbook*

### Imagine:

You are one of the leaders in your congregation and you are down to lead prayers of intercession this Sunday. This past week, your community was in the news because of an ugly racist attack. You happen to encounter a friend in your local shop who is a member of the community who was attacked. In conversation you mention that you are leading prayers on Sunday and they ask what you are going to say about the attack. They look at you whilst you are caught off guard. You had not intended to say anything about the attack because you did not follow the story closely enough to know the facts. You are also worried about saying the wrong thing. Yet in this pause to answer, you see the look of pain in your friend's face. Discuss with your leadership team: What are some of the risks in mentioning local anti-racist attacks in prayers and what are some of the risks of not mentioning it?

You may feel you do not have the 'correct' words to pray in this situation but choosing not to pray could foster even deeper levels of hurt, misunderstanding and mistrust. Above all it communicates that racism is not a high priority for you. Lament gives voice to a community that is hurting. Old Testament prophets used lament to identify the disconnect between God's goodness and the brokenness in the world. Don't know where to start in lament? Here are a few ideas:

- Use Romans 12:15 as a starting point ... God calls us to 'weep with those who weep' therefore we weep today because of ....
- Start a lament using the interrogative: Why Lord? Or Where were you Lord when....? Or How long Lord?
- Simply read a Psalm of lament together (13, 22, 42, 43, 130)
- Nicholas Wolterstorff once wrote: 'As we gather, we bring the trumpets of praise, ashes of repentance, and tears of lament on behalf of our everyday parishes

or neighbourhood, workplace and city before God in worship. And through the liturgy, we are then nurtured in God's story and can carry hope, strength, and courage back to those people and places to which God has called us ('Liturgy and Lament' Perspectives June/July 2012)'. For prayers why not use the 'Trumpets, tears and ashes' approach:

**Trumpets:** What can we celebrate about having a diverse community?

**Tears:** What brings tears and lament because we witness discrimination?

**Ashes:** What issues that cause injustice in this community do we need to repent for corporately?

(If you are not able to lead the prayers, consider making the trumpets, tears and ashes template part of your car ride conversation to church as a means of connecting community and worship).

### After Lament what then?

When we pray the words of confession, we are comforted in hearing God's words of assurance of forgiveness of our sins. After lament, it is fitting to be reminded of God's sovereignty (Habakkuk 3 patterns this) ending with words like: Though the fig tree does not bud and we don't see immediate signs of relief, we still rejoice in God our Saviour, the Sovereign Lord is our strength and salvation.

### Awareness:

- Where is lament present in your liturgy? What topics are lamented?

### Relationships:

- What relationship could you lean into to cultivate greater awareness of what to lament for?

### Commitment:

- Discuss one way to foster lament in your worship.

**Sample Lament Liturgy**

Compassionate God, when the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, You remembered your covenant to them and heard their cry for mercy. Listen to us as we cry out in pain:

Sung Psalm 130

*(<https://churchoftheservantcrc.bandcamp.com/track/deep-and-further-deep-psalm-130>)*

**Refrain:** Deep and further deep I cry to you, Lord  
I cry to you O Lord to hear my plea (repeat)

**Leader:** I cry to you, God,

**People:** Like Hagar in the wilderness, we want to be seen.

**Leader:** I cry to you, God,

**People:** Like Cain, our deep hurts make us want to injure others

**Leader:** I cry to you, God,

**People:** Like Moses, we have been wounded by our closest friend

**Leader:** I cry to you, God,

**People:** in our anger we have smothered our joy

**Leader:** I cry to you, God

**People:** our fleeting lives are diminished by rumours of wars

**Leader:** I cry to you, God

**People:** for the countless bodies lost through violence

**Leader:** Hear our prayer, O Lord, listen to our cry, be not deaf to our weeping, For I dwell with you as a stranger. Restore us to live like flames that burn through the darkest hours, To warm and light the way that all may come in from the cold:

**Refrain:** Deep and further deep I cry to you, Lord  
I cry to you O Lord to hear my plea (repeat)

*(for further resources visit CTBI's Racial Justice Sunday: <https://ctbi.org.uk/category/witnessing-together/racial-justice/racial-justice-sunday/>)*

## Chapter 3

### Racism:

### ‘Not my problem?’

*Being Black in Northern Ireland is traumatic: On a daily basis, racist acts such as name-calling, people waving banana skins from cars, people crossing the road to avoid you, are common experiences. The five Black young adult men I know are reluctant to leave their homes and struggle to stay in (all-White) workplaces.*

‘The real voyage of discovery lies in not seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes’.

Racism is one way of establishing an identity that justifies moral superiority to others. Throughout the ages, people found ways to put others down in order to protect and create security for their own position in society.

This is the reverse of the gospel message. Rather than chosen-ness being a badge of superiority for Christians, God chose his own son Jesus to be the suffering servant and a light to the nations. Jesus came to be a banner to all nations (Isaiah 11:12), so that, even though he was chosen for a specific purpose, it was to create a welcome that broke down all cultural and social barriers. Jesus came to set the slave and oppressed free. The advice given in Romans 13 to submit to governments must be balanced with how leaders like Moses resisted the harmful rule of Pharaoh. Nuanced and careful interpretations of scripture are needed to prevent biblical texts being used to endorse past harmful actions like colonialism. As Christians, we must always carry an acknowledgement of how biblical texts have been used to oppress rather than liberate, including to justify the transatlantic slave trade and African chattel enslavement. Our Churches carry a mixed history of those that fought against enslavement and those who perpetuated it. We cannot erase the past but we can learn from it.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to adopt the same posture as that of Jesus. If we are united to Christ (Philippians 2:1), then we are to be like minded and have the same love for others that Christ had.

#### **Imagine:**

You have signed up to run a marathon (this might be easier for some than others to imagine!). Once you finished the race, you realise some who finished ahead of you got to start the race earlier and so their times looked much better. You also discovered that others got a medal for finishing only the second half of the race. It would be wrong to tell yourself,

if you just trained harder, you would be able to get ahead of those who were given better times or only ran half the race.

In every culture there are unearned privileges at play because those who grew up in a system have automatic understanding of the hidden rules operating in order to bring success. Imagine coming into a culture which has a different language to the one you speak and different cultural values. Like the person running the marathon, it will take you longer to finish the race than others who have a head start. This is made all the more difficult if you don't have access to education or other tools that will help you understand the rules in the first place. In society, many inequalities exist so it is insufficient to assume that everyone will have equal opportunities. It is important to take account of the places where the playing field is not level.

#### **Pause and discuss this phrase with your leadership team:**

*‘Whenever people talk about racism my response is always to say that I choose to be colour blind so that I treat everyone the same regardless of what culture and language they speak’.*

The marginalisation that ethnic minority people and migrants experience in employment, housing, education, healthcare, policing, finance, community, the arts, and many other areas of life, including our churches, is collectively called systemic racism. Systemic racism can be hard to identify because it has been normalised. As a result, unless we know how to look for systemic racism, we don't see it, because we have become so accustomed to the way things are. Many institutions that structure how we live our lives were built at a time when there was the assumption that there was a racial hierarchy of intelligence. Discussions of colonialism can be extremely sensitive. There is a legacy of colonialism that has contributed to inequality in areas like: environmental degradation, disease, economic instability, ethnic rivalries, and human rights violations. Listening to those whose experiences are different to ours helps de-centre colonialism. As individuals we pick up racial biases because society has racial biases embedded in it. Some may think that being part of a white middle class congregation with only a small number of non-white people means that racism is irrelevant. However, this ignores the historical and structural nature of inequality and discrimination: the way public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other elements of our society work to reinforce and perpetuate racial inequalities. As a

result, social, economic, cultural and political disadvantage is disproportionately experienced by Black and minority ethnic groups, including Roma and Travellers.

In the book of Daniel, whilst it is never recorded that Daniel was at fault for sinning, Daniel still chooses to repent on behalf of his people for the ways in which they had turned against God (Daniel 9). Prayer opens our eyes and aligns us with how God's kingdom might break into the kingdoms of this world. The more we come in line with God's will for the world, the more we radically reflect the love of Christ who loved us when we were strangers.

### **Awareness:**

In 2021, during the Euro finals, the English footballers Rashford, Saka and Sancho, three men of colour, missed penalties. They were subjected to a torrent of racial abuse online. Whilst it is easy to blame the ones who wrote the nasty posts, spend some time discussing what other factors are at play contributing to racism.

The Bible gives examples of the individual taking the blame (look up Ezekiel 18:4) and repentance on behalf of society (see Daniel 9:4). How would you respond to someone who said, 'racism is not my problem, I treat everyone the same?'

### **Relationships:**

Try keeping an intercultural journal reflecting on cultural differences and commonalities you observe in your daily interactions with other cultures. Focus on situations you have observed or been a part of in which you and/or others needed to understand cultural differences to respond appropriately. If your interaction with people from other cultural groups is limited, choose to read a book written by someone from another culture and do the same. Research the history of Christianity in your area whilst not ignoring the role of slavery.

### **Commitment:**

'Our local church would value multiculturalism and would consciously make tangible efforts to welcome everyone. But unconsciously the default culture is white, educated, middle class, suburban, Irish Protestant. Anyone who can adjust to that default culture will be comfortable ... Anyone who cannot adjust will ultimately move on.'

Are you able to identify some of the qualities of your congregation's dominant group? What commitment can you make to make to show it is not expected that people adjust to the dominant culture to be welcomed?

A current estimate that there are up to 46 million 'modern slaves' suggests that more human beings are enslaved today than at any point in human history. Identify some commitments from list your congregation might make:

1. Highlight stories of those in our churches who fought against slavery in the past to provide a model of transformative action.
2. Educate yourself about modern day slavery and advocate for policy change to address root causes
3. Challenge exploitative labour practices in your community that particularly affects marginalised people such as migrants and refugees.
4. Encourage members to purchase products that are Fairtrade or from the Ethical Trading Initiative that protect workers from exploitation.

# Denial and minimising in race



*Jack is the lead minister in a church which has many cultures present. The leadership team have made many efforts to build cross-cultural understanding and awareness. The result of this is that the team have identified a handful of strategies in worship and discipleship that all the cultures have in common. The intention for this is to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in worship and discipleship. However, over time, Jack realises that some of the cultures find it easier to be engaged than others. He experiences a sense of frustration that a number of cultures simply do not get involved in the way that he would have hoped. Despite repeated attempts to make explicit that everyone matters and is valued in their church family, Jack realises the level of multicultural involvement has got stuck.*

The above scenario is an example of a tendency to minimise cultural differences to such an extent that it becomes a barrier for the community to move towards deeper cultural engagement.

### Minimising occurs:

- When you do not see cultural difference as a threat to your own cultural practice.
- When you are interested in cultural difference but have a limited ability to adapt to other cultural practices.
- When you are not fully aware of how your ideas and behavior are culturally grounded.
- When you assume people from other cultural backgrounds are 'like us' and you apply your own cultural views to others to minimise cultural difference.
- When you try to avoid racial stereotyping and limit bias by treating everyone individually without fully recognising the importance of cultural differences.
- As a coping strategy by non-dominant culture members in order to survive being part of the dominant group.

There are other actions that can occur when we try to live in a multicultural society:

**Denial** – at times cultural difference is acknowledged in obvious moments (like food difference) but deeper cultural differences (association with time, power distance) are ignored and withdrawal happens from difference. Denial can be harmful as it invalidates the feelings of those who have experienced racism and can perpetuate racism.

**Polarisation:** where cultural difference is viewed in terms of 'us' and 'them'. Polarisation can present itself in one of two ways: Sometimes one's own cultural values are not critiqued whereas other cultural values are heavily critiqued (defensive posture). At other times, one's own cultural values may be heavily criticised but other cultural values are not (reversal posture).

**Acceptance:** a posture that recognises and appreciates patterns of cultural difference.

**Adaptation:** a posture that is prepared to shift cultural perspectives and change behaviour in culturally appropriate ways.

*Emma was the pastor in a church that consisted of founding members who came from the white community but now had the privilege of welcoming many families who had come from different African nations. She noticed that nearly all the white families arrived at church in the five minutes surrounding the starting time of the service whereas the African families often came later. After spending time getting to know the values undergirding both communities, Emma came to realise that the white community valued time and efficiency whereas the families from Africa prioritised relationship building over time. This involved making various changes to the worship service. For the opening ten minutes of the service, there were medleys of gathering songs to allow people to come in and find their seats. Then later on in the service, there was a time of gathering up the prayers of the people, where anyone could offer prayers. This helped build up further understanding in order to deepen relationships.*

### Awareness:

Spend time with your team reflecting on the various postures of multicultural engagement: minimising, denial, polarising, acceptance, adaptation, can you think of examples where any of these have occurred within your congregation. Take time to read the following passages and try to decide which posture is being adopted in each case: Galatians 2:11-14 Peter's actions, Acts 6:1-6 the actions of the twelve, Acts 10:27-29 Peter's response to Cornelius, Romans 15:7-13 Paul's exhortation, Acts 11:1-3 the apostles in Jerusalem,

## Relationships:

In John 4 when Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at the well, he begins by identifying common ground of living water but instead of using this to let the conversation stagnate, this became the secure platform to talk about differences in worship practices and to arouse curiosity in each other's worship traditions. Make a commitment to talk about worship differences and common worship practices with someone from a different culture.

If this is not possible, try as a leadership team to watch a worship online video from a group in your community/town/city who worships in a different way – what is in common and what is different?

Minimising can often be a coping mechanism for those who do not belong to the dominant culture in a congregation. It is often a survival tool of 'go along with to get along with.' Think of ways you can deepen your relationship with people in your congregation who are in the minority to try and understand places of discomfort that they are masking in order to survive being part of the fellowship. It might emerge that the congregation does not provide sufficient safety for a person from a minority ethnic group to bring their views. If this is the case, try to find out in what places do they have a place of safety to be able to express their views.

Matthew 28:19 reminds us of our calling to make disciples of all nations: Rather than Jack seeing frustration in the scenario described above, what opportunities are in front of Jack for deeper engagement?

## Commitment:

Choose some of these questions according to what stage your congregation is at on the anti-racism journey: What resources can you find to help you answer some of the above questions? How visible has your congregation been in anti-racism locally up to now? Is your congregation seen as an ally by people affected by racism? Is there a local network of people supporting anti-racism which you can learn from and join events with? Are there local anti-racism organisations and initiatives in your local community or nationally that your congregation could partner with? How could your congregation best champion the work of congregations led by minoritised or migrant people in your area?

Identify a specific difference you have noticed between your own culture and the practices of another culture you are familiar with. Briefly describe this difference. Give three likely explanations for the meaning of this difference from your own culture. Now try to give three likely explanations for the meaning of this difference from the other group's point of view. What insights have you gained?

## Stating our commitments

By publicly committing to racial justice and inclusion, you are showing you value diversity and are working towards a more just and equitable society. To do this it is important to:

- Acknowledge the reality of racism: that racism exists and is a problem in society. This helps create a shared understanding of racism and sets up a foundation for addressing it.
- Affirm the value of diversity. Emphasise the importance of diversity and inclusion, and highlight the ways in which people from different backgrounds can bring unique perspectives and experiences.
- Commit to taking action. Make concrete commitments to address racism and promote inclusion. This might include implementing anti-racism training, diversifying church groups and outreach work, organisation and decision-making, and supporting organisations that support ethnic minorities and promote racial justice.
- Listen to and learn from marginalised communities. Centre the voices of marginalised communities in your efforts to address racism and promote inclusion. Take time to listen and use these perspectives and experiences to inform your actions.

Here is an example of what a commitment might look like:

We acknowledge that race inequality exists on the island of Ireland We acknowledge that diversity brings benefits in helping us to see the world as God created it and in bringing the wealth of human talent to our work in the Church.

We acknowledge that solidarity and commitment are needed to make a visible difference. We commit to doing more to recruit more diversely into parish groups and leadership roles, as well as creating accountability structures to ensure we achieve this.

## The wider Church:

- Ask your Church leaders and prayer leaders to create space to publicly and consistently pray against the problems of racism.
- Ask if your Church leaders, senior members and staff are engaging in any anti-racism education or training.

## Your local congregation:

- Learning: Is your local congregation actively looking to lead in this area? The best way to do this is to identify and describe how to achieve goals e.g. I would like to accomplish 'XXXX'. I know I will have accomplished 'XXX' when ....

Here are two examples of goal/progress indicators:

### Goal 1:

I would like to understand more of how my own culture has shaped my understanding of Christianity.

**Progress indicator 1:** I know I will have made progress on this goal when I can better explain my own views and values in cultural terms to people from my own cultural community and people from diverse groups.

### Goal 2:

I would like to increase my leadership in my congregation around diversity

**Progress indicator 2:** I will make a commitment to set up a team in our congregation as well as set goals for increasing diversity. I will also make a commitment to keep engaging in conversations about cultural difference and make notes in an intercultural journal to report back to the team.

If you are a white majority or white-led congregation, ask how you can engage more effectively with and learn from the response of Black- or migrant-led denominations.

Remember: Don't put the burden of teaching onto ethnic minority or migrant members of the Church. Seeking knowledge is our collective responsibility. Do listen to those of ethnic minority or migrant background in your own Church.

# Worship and belonging

*I would love our denomination to recognise that it is not easy for people to integrate into a culture that is not their own and do something about intentionally recognising this so that we can become a more welcoming and inclusive church.*

Diverse, Christ-centred worship can be a beautiful pathway to maturity in the body of Christ. Utilising diverse gifts and cultures can help realise the goals of Ephesians 4:11-13: to reach unity in the faith, become mature and attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. When diverse cultures worship together, it provides a fuller picture of God as different cultures bring insights. Most of all, diverse worship gives a glimpse of the end goal, where one day all nations will gather to worship the Lamb on the throne (Revelation 7:9 ff).

Diverse worship can also lead to personal transformation. When we come to worship, we have the freedom to come as we are, but we should leave transformed as we are challenged and changed by the ministry and witness of Christ in other people's lives.

Worship can be a meeting point for different cultural expectations. In the West, congregations come to expect a linear service with a fixed start and end time. Those from the global South enjoy polychronic time, where the service will start when people arrive and songs are cyclical and sung many times to deepen relationships. How time is interpreted in multicultural worship can either be an invitation to bless or a collision course!

Before developing ways to foster stronger multicultural relationships it is important to try and position where your congregation currently is. With your group take a moment to discern:

- Is your congregation culturally uniform: Your congregation has a strong sense of inherited patterns of worship and only one dominant language is spoken with no outside multicultural influences present. Any references to other countries come through the lens and perspective of the dominant group. Newcomers are expected to assimilate to the dominant group (**unity without diversity**).
- Does your congregation display moments of cultural independence: where there are separate cultural groups maybe worshipping separately in different languages either in separate services or in one service (**diversity without unity**).

- Does your congregation attempt to include cultural difference: where separate cultural groups are invited to sing songs in different languages, but each language group still stays separate whilst appreciating the gifts that other cultures bring (**unity with invited diversity**).
- Is your congregation integrating cultural difference: where different cultures attempt to learn each other's songs and worship styles (**unity with blended diversity**).
- Is your congregation attempting cultural innovation: where different cultures come together and innovatively fuse language and styles of worship and learn a new form together (**cultural innovation**).

Depending on where your congregation is on this spectrum, there are different ways to foster welcome:

### **Unity without diversity:**

Some congregations might have words of welcome coming from different languages present in their liturgy to signal welcome. They might encourage songs to be sung in diverse languages (or played on a video) during the offering. During the prayers for others, how might different voices be included? Are there ways to find out prayer points from people of other countries to hear what their prayers might be for their home country?

### **Diversity without unity:**

Presenting songs in other languages during the offering can be a start. However, this might create passivity within the congregation in that it requires low involvement. Deep integration is challenging and time and labour intensive. A deeper form of engagement is to try saying simple words or phrases from a new culture when the peace is passed or as part of a blessing. There are hymns and songs that are well known across the globe where different verses can be sung in different languages. This demonstrates an intention to incorporate cultures more deeply. Beware of simply signaling that other cultures are present. It must be accompanied with a deeper desire to include and welcome.

**Unity with invited diversity:**

Once songs have been invited in, another question to consider is:

Is it the dominant culture making decisions on when and where songs may be included? Whenever a new song is introduced, how is it introduced and by whom? How these questions are answered all provide clues as to who is the host and who is the guest in worship. Hospitality says, 'we welcome you' but solidarity and mutuality say, 'we need you'.

A posture of hospitality may still keep cultural blind spots intact whereas mutuality exposes some of our ignorance and racial prejudice. How might you invite people from other cultures to make decisions around song choice, leading new songs and offering insights to worship both formally and informally? Are there ways to build in moments that honors different cultural expectations around time? Sometimes by offering a song cycle at the start for people to gently arrive to the service can be an act of hospitality.

**Unity with blended diversity:**

Occasionally, a congregation can integrate cultures in worship at a deep level. Not only is there diversity in leadership and decision making but the musicians are able to learn from each other and cultivate innovative music.

This depends on a high level of flexibility in musicianship. However, there are other ways that provide access points to worship.

Movement in worship can be a powerful way to encourage people from other cultures to make contact. This may be at a time when people move to pass the peace to each other. It may be a moment at the end when everyone gathers in a large circle to say the benediction whilst looking at people's faces around the sanctuary. Or, if your tradition encourages movement during communion, moments of exchange may happen here.

Ultimately, worship provides a space to practice healthy spiritual disciplines: communion with God, the Spirit's leading and conviction in both planning for and during the service, attentiveness to the congregation, and to the musicians and others who are helping lead worship with you.

**Awareness:**

Spend some time identifying where your congregation might place itself on the depth of cultural engagement.

When we encounter something new in worship, we will feel uncomfortable. How might you enable a congregation to embrace discomfort towards seeing the fulfilment of the Revelation 7 vision of the worshipping nations?

Consider this comment *'In leadership meetings when I am the only voice from a different background I have been told, 'well you're here now and that is how things are here', which had the undertone of, 'if you don't like it go back to where you came from'.* What would you do if this comment was heard in your congregation?

**Relationships:**

Is there someone from another culture worshipping in your congregation that you could ask the same question to. If a different answer is given, try to understand why this may be.

**Commitment:**

Consider different moments in a worship service: call to worship, greeting, prayers, passing of the peace, Scripture reading, sermon, prayers for the people, offering, communion and benediction: Can you identify places where you might be able to express the worship of the nations?

# Language and belonging



### One language or many?

When considering how to break down language barriers in worship, perhaps the greatest barrier to consider is the English language. In a youth group meeting of a city church, the youth leader asked a simple ice breaker question to the group: How many languages are you comfortable speaking in. For most of the White young people, they were comfortable in English and maybe were able to understand at least one other language. When the African youth were asked, many of them were fluent in at least three to four languages and could understand a couple of others well too. When pressed further, it became clear that different languages were used in different contexts. In school and educational contexts English was prioritised. On national television, the national language was used. At home, when speaking with grandparents, the local language was used.

An easy assumption to make would be to use the English language as the common denominator for worship. However, perhaps a better approach is to understand people's heart languages and what is the most appropriate language to use in which contexts.

When Jesus was praying to God in anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, he began with the phrase 'Abba' in Aramaic. Rabbi Jonathan from the 3rd century summarises how Jesus spoke a variety of languages in 1st century Palestine: 'Greek for song, Latin for war, Aramaic for mourning, Hebrew for speaking'.

There is no doubt language can be used both to include and exclude depending on context. The Shibboleth test in Judges 12:5-6 and the markers to separate the Ashdodite and the Judean children in Nehemiah 13:23-24 are both examples where language is switched to challenge ethnic boundaries. If English is the only language used, then it also has the potential to include and exclude. Through building relationships with different cultures, a more nuanced approach to language use can be developed.

### Oral or literacy based?

Pastor Jack was curious as to why members of his community would often not turn up to important congregational meetings. After talking to some families, he realised that they did not read the bulletin and unless an event was announced from the pulpit, they would not receive the message. In order

to help reinforce the message, Pastor Jack asked one of his young people to put out a WhatsApp translated audio message of key bulletin points so that no one would feel left out.

This example does not just apply to different cultural groups. People often have different preferences in receiving information.

### In preaching:

Just as it is important to understand the cultural contexts in which biblical texts were originally formed, it is also important to be able to connect in preaching with people coming from diverse cultural contexts today.

Consider which sources you are using and which illustrations. Are they dominated by Western, white voices? Or are there a variety of voices represented.

When Jill realised that her sermons were being received by different cultural groups in different ways, she formed a small preacher gathering. Each week, this small diverse group would read the text together and discuss the key ideas. By listening to various perspectives this helped inform Jill's preaching in broader ways as well as reaching her congregation at a deeper level.

As our neighbourhoods change, our worship needs to change. If our worship does not include or embody our love for our real neighbours, then it does not adequately reflect the God we worship who loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten son. As we continue to refine our communication style, we reflect the heart of God and continue to ignite our prophetic and moral imaginations to give voice to the true kingdom of justice and righteousness which should be life and breath for those suffocated by the kingdoms of this world.

**Awareness:**

Take time to analyse how people both inside and outside your congregation get and share information. How might you identify ways to share information in alternative ways so that no group feels excluded. Are there audio, visual and video means to communicate messages that are primarily communicated through the written word?

**Relationship:**

How has being friends with people who have a different language than you shaped your understanding of worship?

If you don't have a friend with someone from a different language, how might you learn more from other language groups?

**Commitment:**

Make a commitment to learn how language is used in different family homes. Here are some areas where different languages might be used: watching the news, in speaking with family members particularly grandparents, in speaking with people from the same country but a different language group, when praying what language is used? Once these languages are gathered, use it as a platform to discuss how ....

# Why inclusion and belonging matters



Imagine a giraffe has been stranded on an island ... he spotted a fish swimming against the current and it looked like the fish needed assistance. Being of kind heart, the giraffe strived to help the fish. At considerable risk, the giraffe moved towards the edge – reached down and took the fish out of the water ... The giraffe laid the fish on dry ground ... and for a few moments, the fish showed excitement but soon settled into a peaceful rest.

The point being made is that sometimes, we assume we are helping others thrive but if we are not fully aware of culture and context, we could actually end up suffocating those who need our help the most. Sometimes our helping can be hurting. As church leaders, it is crucial to demonstrate an agility in interfacing with different cultures so that our helping is not in fact hurting. In committing to anti-racism, leaders have opportunities to be courageous as well as to exercise humility, an essential element of empathetic leadership.

One of the foundational calls is found in Genesis 12 where Abraham is chosen to be blessed so that he in turn might be a blessing to the nations around him.

Pause with your leadership team and try to come up with a list of biblical leaders who moved from their own culture to lead in another culture: (here's a few ideas Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Esther, Paul, Jonah, Peter and of course Jesus!)

- Some of these leaders had to acknowledge the history of discrimination that was affecting minority groups in the culture.
- For Moses, Esther and Peter, they had to make structural changes so that certain people groups were not discriminated against.
- All of these leaders demonstrated prayerful courage to have difficult conversations with other leaders in the community.
- Many of these leaders had to face up to their own fears about speaking out about instances of racism and saying the wrong thing. They brought these fears to God and God was able to provide reassurances.

Ultimately, all of these leaders emulated the leadership example of Jesus. As son of God, Jesus did not consider it important to stay within the comfort of being with God but took on human form fully embodying all the discomfort of birth, growth and temptation. He willingly chose to suffer

on the cross in order to bring those who were alien to God back home and enable the fullest of flourishing.

He modelled an incarnational leadership that identified with those he came to love (Hebrews 4:15) rather than providing a neat formula of salvation.

He demonstrated love for the world first even while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8).

He also willingly sacrificed his life rather than choosing security and comfort (Hebrews 7:27).

In the Old Testament, God commanded his people to love the stranger because they should remember that they were once strangers also in Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:19). In the New Testament, God still calls out for us to love the stranger because ultimately Jesus died for us out of a deep love for us as exiles (1 Peter 1:1,2). God calls to continue to 'live out your time as foreigners in reverent fear (1 Peter 1:17)'.

If this is the posture Christians should have in this world, then we cannot hold tightly onto any piece of land since it ultimately belongs to the Creator. It also means embodying the same incarnational, loving sacrificial posture that Jesus had.

Pause with your leadership team and ask them to discuss modern day examples of this kind of leadership they see at work in church and society today:

### **Jonah was a man just like us ...**

Perhaps one of the most compelling examples of evolving cross cultural leadership is the example of Jonah. This book was written during the Persian period (Approx. 548-332 BC) and like the book of Ruth, it was written to challenge some of the narrow nationalistic, exclusive tendencies that had developed amongst the Jews. Attitudes towards foreigners were ones of suspicion and even hatred. The Assyrians had been long time enemies of Jonah's people because of their deep oppressive ways. Whenever Jonah was called to go to Nineveh 'that great city' which was the ancient capital of Assyria, he had a convulsive reaction and instead fled to Tarshish. Perhaps, he believed he could still carry out God's mission there because God was not known there either (Isaiah 66:19).

However, when Jonah finally gets back on track with God, he goes to Nineveh, and he witnesses repentance on a massive scale. Even the animals are covered in sackcloth (Jonah 3:8). As a result, God has compassion on the Ninevites and did not bring the intended destruction upon them.

However, Jonah responded in anger to God's actions and yet God drew near to Jonah through dialogue and challenged Jonah to align his concerns with God's concerns for the world (Jonah 4:10-11).

When questioned about the challenges facing members of their congregation who come from minority ethnic backgrounds, church leaders identified five areas they felt were most common:

1. Racist 'jokes' and micro-aggressions 46%
2. Unemployment or limited employment opportunities 45%
3. Racial abuse (verbal) 42%
4. Discrimination in the workplace 40%
5. Inadequate housing or homelessness 28%

Showing leadership to counter exclusion and racism may seem overwhelming but it begins with some simple actions:

- Acknowledge the history of discrimination in our society: like Jonah, who do we find it easy to reach and where are our Ninevehs?
- Seek learning opportunities and share them. Ask other congregations about their journeys towards Nineveh in working to become more inclusive.
- Invest in resources and expertise to support your congregation to follow your lead on this issue.
- Be courageous. Have those difficult conversations within your congregation. Remember that becoming antiracist as a community requires time and reiteration.
- Listen to what young members have to say about racism and inclusion.
- Be vulnerable. Don't let fear of saying the wrong thing lead to silence or disengagement. Be honest with God about your own fears and prejudice and ask God to keep revealing your blind spots. If you make a mistake, take responsibility. Apologise quickly and use the occasion to reiterate your commitment to combating discrimination.
- Empower colleagues to speak up about instances of racism or lack of inclusion, even if only implied, including instances where you are personally responsible. You can

only grow if others are willing to teach you, and you need to create a safe and confident space to encourage others to do so.

*I long to see a diverse representation of followers of Jesus with representation on leadership too. I would like to see a move from the fringes towards the centre of church life for those too often left on the margins.*

### Awareness:

Can you think of examples where Christians with good intentions tried to minister to people of other cultures but ended up creating more harm than good?

What are some of the reasons Jonah was reluctant to go to Nineveh?

What qualities of God are on display through the story of Jonah that we would not see if Jonah had not gone to Nineveh?

If you were asked what are the main challenges facing members coming from minority ethnic backgrounds, what areas would you identify? How would you know if they were accurate?

### Relationships:

Sometimes the phrase 'my God' becomes an exclusive statement and it is hard to imagine a faith that is shared with cultures that are traditionally our enemies. Why do you think we tend to hold on to such views of God that run counter to the mission of Christianity?

Think of leaders in your community who have ministered effectively in cultures not their own. How might you build relationships with them to learn about strengthening relationships across cultural divides?

List ways in which you might provide support to these leaders so that they may develop their skills for intercultural ministry.

How might you encourage and celebrate leaders who are modelling the qualities of leadership that help build up healthy communities. Ensure that recognition is equally given to people of all backgrounds.

### Commitment:

What is your Nineveh or Nazareth? Dave Gibbons in the 'Monkey and the Fish' suggests that one of the first commitments to be made in diverse leadership ministry is to identify what your Nazareth is ... that place that you struggle to understand if anything good can come from it, or people who have been misjudged and as a result mistreated. Try to identify what your Nazareth might be in your leadership context and begin to pray about how you might draw closer to the people you consider to be from Nazareth.

Some of the leadership qualities mentioned above that are helpful in the anti-racism journey are: incarnational, loving and sacrificial. List 3 examples of how you intend to put these qualities into practice in your context:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 8

# Unity or uniformity?

One of the unique strengths of Christianity is that the message of Christ is infinitely translatable into various cultures. Andrew Walls, a pioneer in the field of world Christianity in his book *The cross-cultural process in Christian history* observed, that for Muslims, the divine Qur'an Word was forever fixed in Arabic but for the Christian, the divine Word is 'infinitely translatable'. This mirrors and is inseparable 'from the conviction that in Christ, God's own self was translated into human form.'

As Christians, our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). Every human can convey the good news of God's kingdom in ways appropriate to their local context. However, in congregations that are predominantly from one cultural group, it is possible that the diverse 'infinitely translatable' quality of the gospel is diminished. If the congregation is a close group with similar views and values, people outside of that group may feel unwelcome or have a sense of 'otherness'. This makes it unlikely for people from minority groups to feel safe enough to truly express their views and fully participate in group activities like prayer meetings or decision making.

It can be alienating to realise you are in a congregational meeting and everyone thinks differently about a certain issue to you. The natural tendency is to retreat. Have you ever heard of someone who has booked a cleaner to come and clean their house and yet before the cleaner comes the homeowner cleans the house because they are afraid of what the cleaner might think of its true condition? Yet, often congregations can be places where we hide our mess rather than bringing it honestly before God for deep cleaning. 1 John 1:5-7 serves as a reminder that God wants us to walk fully in the light with no hiding since this increases the depth of our relationships not just with God but with each other. As leaders, it is important to model this, so that when decisions are made, members feel confident in voicing legitimate concerns so that decisions are not pushed through nor alternative voices hushed up.

When a variety of cultures are present, healthy decision making can become even more challenging. Some cultures will look to their leader to voice an opinion on their behalf. Others will prefer to have each individual express an opinion before a decision is made. Still others might interpret alternative individual opinions as bringing shame to the whole community.

Multicultural decision making is complex and challenging!

Pause for a moment with your leadership team and consider: How do you discern the difference between decisions made in the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3) and simple uniformity because everyone thinks the same way?

How we live out our faith in ways that honour all cultures can bring sharp disagreement. Yet, this is nothing new. Acts 15 is a good example of how church leaders avoided groupthink and with the help of the Holy Spirit, honestly discerned the Lord's leading. Paul and Barnabas were summoned to the leadership in Jerusalem because there was opposition to their actions. Some believed new Gentile converts had to fully assimilate into the dominant group by becoming Jews through circumcision and obeying the Mosaic law. Myths and fears about other cultures, are almost always based in an idea that we don't know the people concerned, and anti-migrant narratives are always based in dehumanising the people concerned.

By responding with human stories, we bring the humanity back into discussions. Paul and Barnabas were trying to model this in how they interacted with the council. Acts 15 models a process for working through these tensions :

- There was discussion (vs 7).
- Peter who had previous experience on this issue was brought in to address the group (vs 7), Peter's presence helped counter misinformation and affirmed the Holy Spirit's work in Gentile believers (vs 8) He did this before questioning the council's sources (vs 10) so that they would not go into defensive mode.
- Barnabas and Paul were allowed to give their testimony (vs 12).
- The group listened silently and attentively (vs 12) It is important to create a space where anxiety and fear are not controlling the conversation. Arm yourself with facts, but convey emotion with personal stories. While facts are important, human stories allow for deeper connection. When you're talking to someone who sees other people's lives as less valuable than their own, the first step is trying to build empathy.
- It is important to try and understand where the division and difficulty is coming from so that the real concerns may be addressed. Peter addresses the council's central concern in his speech (vs 11). Sometimes by asking open-

ended questions like: 'What bothers you most about this issue?' and then listening to the response helps uncover the real concern and deep fear.

- Scripture was carefully handled (vs 16).
- Only then did the leader of the group (James) give his opinion (vs 13ff).
- Difficult conversations can easily get personal very quickly. Don't lose sight of the purpose involved (vs 19), for the council it was about allowing Gentiles to draw close to God. It is not about winning arguments but remembering Christ's love for the world.
- Clear communication was given to the Gentile believers (vs 24).
- Much grace was offered (vs 28).
- The result was that the Gentile believers were greatly encouraged (vs 31).

#### **Pause with your leaders to reflect:**

What elements of this example show that the decision was made in unity of the Spirit rather than simple unanimity of thought?

What elements of this process does your group do well?  
What areas need growth?

How might difficult conversations be seen in terms of the longer view of God's mission for this world?

#### **Words of Caution:**

Just because leadership is diverse does not automatically guarantee diverse decision making. A majority group may tolerate a limited number of token views as long as the status quo is maintained. The hidden assumption is that other cultures must assimilate into the dominant group's culture. Rubber fences is the term given when an invisible boundary is placed within a system that stretches just enough to have the appearance of interaction with different cultures but snaps right back the moment a challenge comes from the outside.<sup>5</sup> This is the narrative of how racial microaggressions are utilised in predominantly white social spaces to test whether people of colour are willing to serve the interests of whites in their space. The boundaries are semi-permeable to admit just enough people of colour on the condition that newcomers are small enough in number and small enough in effect that the system will not be under threat.

Anyone who has experienced being the minority voice in a group will have a sense of whether their words, texts, ideas or emails are being filtered to see whether they endorse the majority message.

Other ideas to enable fuller participation in decision making:

- As a leader, rather than jumping in immediately with an opinion hold back until the end and instead offer space to pray, encouraging the group to offer up in prayer concerns and doubts to God and if there are concerns that still linger encourage them to be spoken out.
- Putting Jesus at the centre: When different views are expressed always consider: Does this view help portray an aspect of Jesus' life and witness that I had not seen before?
- If you are ministering in a multicultural setting it can be useful to discuss difficult questions in cultural groups so that individual cultures may share freely and then use the leaders of each cultural group to report back to the leadership team.
- Deliberately assign a trusted member of the group to ask hard questions.

Diversity can help us solve problems when as a group we learn to be comfortable with discussion and learning from one another, and supportive of those who express differing opinions for discussion. Research shows that when leaders know how to draw out diverse perspectives, build on them, and be inclusive of varying perspectives, they gain better ideas, question assumptions, identify blind spots, develop new approaches, and create better solutions.

*'As more people are given a voice in leadership, I believe the church will become more inviting and open'.*

#### **Awareness:**

How can your leadership team become more aware of whether it is operating in the unity of the Spirit or in simple uniformity? Two exercises that might help with uncovering the illusion of total agreement where alternative voices feel unable to speak out: First, before moving towards discussion on a difficult question, get each member of the group to write down some of their thoughts to the question. Then once a discussion has taken place encourage people to speak out if any of the concerns written on the paper have not yet been heard. A second exercise is at the end of the meeting to pass

out pieces of paper and each member of the group is invited to write a number on a scale from 1-10, 1 representing 'I feel was not able to speak up with my views' and 10 representing 'I feel I was fully able to express my views'. If the numbers that come back are consistently low, it might invite further opportunity to slow down the decision-making process and ask a question like: What factors do we need to take into our decision making?

#### **Relationships:**

If there are people in your congregation present from other cultures commit to learning about how decisions are usually made in their culture and feed this back to the leadership team to discuss how they might adjust decision making to take this into account.

When dealing with a difficult topic, are there people from outside of your congregation who have experienced a similar situation who might be able to come in and offer helpful guidance?

#### **Commitment:**

Forced uniformity in decision making can occur whenever the topic being discussed is complex and difficult. It is tempting to remove discomfort by pushing towards a decision. Time and space to evaluate the situation and pray that the best alternative will emerge. A useful prayer to pray is what Ruth Haley Barton calls the prayer of indifference: 'Lord make me indifferent to anything other than your will for us'. Committing to pause and pray could make all the difference between feeling forced down a route where there are no alternatives and opening up a new and creative way to move forward.

## Chapter 9

# Working with young people



*I work with youth [in church] and I overheard a conversation between some of the kids explaining how segregation was good and that 'mixing' of races was always bad, that one should keep to their own 'kind'.*

*I would like to see my son return to church and feel at home, free to be fully himself.*

'The worst conversation adults can have with their children about race is no conversation at all' – Jemar Tisby.

Raising the issue of race with young people may seem daunting and may vary in each family context but the science is clear: 'the earlier parents start the conversation with their children the better.'<sup>6</sup> Children and young people instinctively learn about racial stereotypes from adults and the environment they live in and can notice difference from an early age.

In the Old Testament some portions talk about living in a country that is governed according to God's rule. However, a large part of the Old Testament covers stories of people forced to live in countries that do not recognise or honour God. Weaving this awareness into already existing children and youth programmes can raise important questions about how to live responsibly as Christians in ways that do not discriminate or dehumanise others. Children as young as five years old tend to have an innate understanding of what is fair. Talking about racial discrimination as being unfair is an important starting point.

The example of the prophet Daniel who, as a young person was forced to live in a strange culture provides sensitivity towards some of the difficult decisions a young person makes when living in a culture far removed from their home culture. Getting young people to empathise by imagining what food they would miss the most as well as what kind of changes they might need to make to survive in a very different culture helps raise awareness. In primary school, it is important to be curious about diversity present in school and to encourage curiosity about learning. What are young people hearing in school and through social media and challenge any stereotypes that may emerge. It can also be an opportunity to learn what support is being offered in the community for refugees and asylum seekers as well as considering what support might look like for those living in the community.

Another simple starting point in raising the discussion with young people is to go to a Bible site like [www.Biblegateway.com](http://www.Biblegateway.com) and search for the word 'stranger' or 'foreigner' in the NIV translation. After reading a selection of verses aloud ask the group to come up with themes emerging about God's view of the stranger. (e.g. God's people often lived as strangers and because of that God asked them to be kind to strangers in return). As young people grow older, encourage moments to bring the outside world into your own home. How might you explore other cultures through the food you eat and the films you watch together. Explore how apartheid was challenged in South Africa or the civil rights movement in the United States as important historical learning points.

**Discussion point:** When families move into a culture, the young people are often fully immersed in the new language and culture through education. This can often mean that young people assimilate faster than their parents. Sometimes the dissonance between home cultural values and the new culture are felt strongly by parents and felt keenly at home. How might congregations support families in this intergenerational context?

Churches can play a significant role in growing leadership and mentoring by providing guidance, support, and encouragement to individuals seeking to grow and develop their leadership skills. One of the most significant ways the gospel grew was life on life discipleship, similar to how Paul mentored and encouraged Timothy. A good starting point in identifying mentoring possibilities is to follow Paul's example of praying for leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-4). This heightens awareness of leadership potential. Some other ways to encourage young people are to:

- Identify individuals with leadership potential and provide opportunities for them to keep growing in Knowledge. 1 Timothy 4:6-16 look at how Paul encouraged Timothy to reject silly myths and keep growing towards truth. 1 Timothy 6:20-21
- Model how to deal with difference well rather than minimising. Look at 1 Timothy 6:3-6 for Paul's wise leadership in this
- Humbly and vulnerably, be prepared to talk about your own journey of identifying prejudice and moving beyond it. (1 Timothy 1:12-17)
- Culture today can provide various challenges in how to

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/parenting/talking-to-your-kids-about-racism>

make wise decisions. Leadership can be a high calling touching on all aspects of life (1 Timothy 3:1-3). How might youth programmes touch on supportive feedback in a structured way so that young people can make wise decisions on stewardship, peer friendships, self-control. Young people can help identify which issues cause the most stress today.

- Foster a culture of mentorship by encouraging experienced leaders to invest in the development of younger or less experienced leaders. This can be as simple as praying for young leaders or providing opportunities for mentorship and coaching, providing opportunities to serve in leadership roles, as well as modelling the values and behaviours of effective leaders.

It can be fulfilling to see young people transform into Christlike leaders. Even when young leaders are not perfect, recognising and celebrating milestones of growth in turn raises awareness of what it is like to follow Jesus, the greatest servant leader of all.

### Awareness:

1. In the children's curriculum, are stories told in ways that highlight the cultural differences of those involved and how God responds to people from all cultures – if not what resources might be introduced to do this?
2. Empower young people to create their own anti-racist environment in their youth group through actions such as educating others, outreach work or learning with other groups.

### Relationships:

1. If your youth group includes children who have experienced racism, include them actively in the planning of activities, but allow them to lead or hold back as they feel comfortable.
2. Avoid asking young people affected by racism to share their experiences publicly or explain why they felt it was racist. Recounting discrimination can be traumatic.
3. The 5 pillars of youth work set important relational boundaries to help consider how to approach this issue with young people: Young people choose to take part, they

are enabled to share and develop their view of the world, they are treated with respect, development of skills and attitudes is a key goal, young people are helped to develop stronger relationships and collective identities.

### Commitment:

1. Show your youth where to find petitions and protests, and how to positively show commitment to social change.
2. Identify young people with the potential to become young leaders and develop mentoring support.
3. Encourage youth to follow social media accounts such as @everydayracism to make racism more visible.

(More helpful resources can be found in the learning resources at the end)

### Including refugees and asylum seekers

As a congregation, there are several ways to include and support refugees and asylum seekers in your community. By taking these steps, congregations can play an important role in creating a more inclusive and welcoming community for refugees and asylum seekers.

- Educate your congregation about the challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the policies and processes involved in seeking asylum in your country. This can help dispel myths and stereotypes and encourage empathy and support.
- Many refugees and asylum seekers face language barriers when they arrive in a new country. Consider offering language classes or language exchange programs to help refugees and asylum seekers improve their language skills and integrate into the community.
- Refugees and asylum seekers may need practical support with tasks such as finding housing, employment, and accessing healthcare. Consider partnering with local organisations that provide support and services to refugees and asylum seekers, or providing practical help directly as a congregation.

- Encourage cultural exchange between refugees and asylum seekers and members of your congregation. This can help break down barriers and foster understanding and mutual respect.
- Advocate for the rights and needs of refugees and asylum seekers in your community and beyond. This can include supporting policy changes that make it easier for refugees and asylum seekers to access support and services, and advocating for the fair treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

## Chapter 10

# The song of jubilee: God's vision for creation



*All colours and races worshipping together. That's the Biblical dream and we need to make it happen as much as can before it is going to gloriously happen!*

What is the song God wants us to sing for the future? The sheet music for this song is etched into the very fabric of scripture ... if the time signature is Sabbath, the key signature is Jubilee.

The concept of Jubilee is first found in the book of Leviticus. Some books of the Bible are more challenging to engage with than others. Stories about King David, the prophet Jonah as well as stories about Jesus can capture our imagination. However, when we reach books like Leviticus, we need to understand the overarching theme for all the stipulations to make sense.

The goal of Leviticus is to enable us to live out our Sinai-based vocation as holy people: to lead us on a journey to be made whole. Through Leviticus, Israel had an opportunity to become a living show and tell of how God offers true freedom and this in turn was to attract their neighbours to follow God. At the heart of Leviticus is the concept of Jubilee and sabbath keeping in Leviticus 25.

Just before, in chapter 24, the people were reminded of how the bread of the presence kept in front of the ark of the covenant was a symbol of God showing up every day in the wilderness to offer daily provision through manna. Then, in chapter 26, God tells the people: 'I will stroll back and forth among you, I will be your God and your will be my people.'

Both chapters display God's attributes of being the generous host who longs to commune with his people. The way this is achieved is through atonement .... Where God's people learn once more what it means to be 'at-one' with God. The practices of Jubilee were instituted on the first day of atonement, the Sabbath, which can only suggest that they are congruent with this life of wholeness.

In our post-covid world, many more people have hybrid working arrangements. Church services, whilst more accessible than ever through social media can also allow for more detachment. Sabbath and jubilee help fire the theological and ethical imagination to draw us back to 'at- onement' with God.

When we stop to worship on the Sabbath, we are protesting against cultures of scarcity, overwork and inequality. Like the God portrayed in Leviticus 24, we are trusting that God is enough. Sabbath allows us to stop long enough to realise God is always at work and it deepens our trust in God as Creator. Jubilee helps reinforce close connection with our Maker. In Jubilee, slaves were to be set free, land was to lie fallow and was also to be reclaimed for those who were in debt. This mirrored God's great acts in history: the setting free of slaves was a reminder of the exodus liberation, the letting the land lie fallow was a reminder of the wilderness journey where God's people trusted in God to provide manna rather than through their own efforts, the reclaiming of the land for those who were in debt was a moment of restoration for the disinherited and displaced so that they could return home to their own promised land.

Yet, what does Jubilee look like today? For refugees and migrant workers who have felt the pressure of economics and conflict it is often not viable to return home. Even more so for families who have lived far from home into the second and third generations.

In Luke 4 when Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day to pronounce that he was the fulfillment of Jubilee he quickly segued to describe how Elijah visited the widow of Zarephath. This widow was perceived as a foreigner from Sidon who would have had no land rights and yet Jesus was making the point that through faith in God she now belonged and had a kingdom inheritance. The Jews in the synagogue were outraged at the generosity of the gospel and couldn't accept this Jubilee. Yet Jesus' point was that in the kingdom, there was a baseline carpet where no-one should sink below: no-one should feel crushed: no-one should feel left behind. This was beautifully expressed by one respondent who replied to the question 'What do you long to see happen in your congregation?'

*Unity through diversity. Becoming a voice for the powerless. Pursuing Shalom and showing what it looks like to delight in each other's cultures and weep when injustice is done.*

We all like the idea of justice and freedom but if it is solely for ourselves, it is merely privilege. Jesus' justice is for everyone. Jesus, the son of God who had everything, modelled jubilee by leaving his own place of comfort to welcome the stranger into his kingdom. The excluded and marginalised in society feel as much at home in his kingdom as the ones who were born Jews. Sabbath keeps us awake and alive to this song.

As Eugene Peterson says: *Sabbath is a way of 'rehearsing God's promises and God's blessings so that when we go back to work, we're not scattered or following our own noses – but we are congruent with the way God works to become more deeply at home in creation than ever before 'internalising' the creation cadences of the God who made heaven and earth.'*<sup>7</sup>

So, are you able to join in the powerful song of Jubilee?

*'Jubilee is an act of faith, an act of hope, an act of conviction that grace goodness and holiness exist even though none of them has triumphed fully. The festive jubilation tradition makes particular sense in this context for it says that despite brokenness, there is a Sabbath quiet, despite brother murdering brother, there is forgiveness, despite massive inequality, there is a prophetic justice. Despite slaughter our world lurches towards Bethlehem where a new world aches to be born'. Maria Harris 'Proclaim Jubilee'.*

### Awareness:

As you reflect on the concept of Jubilee, think of the 3 different stages of God's salvation story: exodus, wilderness and promised land and consider:

Has your Jubilee dream shrunk back to feel more like you are living in Egypt than in the full liberation experience? Why do you think this is?

Or maybe you are stuck in the wilderness with a scarcity mentality of worrying that there is never enough ... what Sabbath rhythms might you be able to inhabit to release this worry into God's care?

Maybe you know the fullness of the promised land and have experienced contentment: How might you be more aware of how this could be shared with others around you?

### Relationships:

As you contemplate Sabbath keeping who are you in relationship with who might benefit more from Sabbath rest? Reflect on this quote:

*'I have come to love this land and adopted country but every single foreigner I have met (including myself) is lonely and 'uninvited' to life in other people's homes. It is very sad how insular and family-oriented people are.'*

*In what ways can you extend Sabbath rest to others?*

### Commitment:

Think of ways your land might be used to help benefit others: It might be as simple as planting flowers to share with your neighbor, or offering green space in your church land to let neighbors have allotments.

How might you promote ethical consumption by encouraging the congregation to purchase products that are certified as free from slavery and exploitation such as Fairtrade products or those certified by organisations like the Ethical Trading Initiative.

*'The journey for racial justice continues, but the music we hear along the way is not a funeral dirge; it is festival music leading us to a banquet of blessings and a harvest of righteousness' The Color of Compromise, Jemar Tisby.*

***'Do not retreat into your private world,  
There are more ways than firesides to keep warm;  
There is no shelter from the rage of life,  
So meet its eye, and dance within the storm.'***

From *Do not retreat into your private world* by Kathy Galloway, former leader of the Iona Community.

First published in *Bread of Tomorrow* ed. Janet Morley, SPCK/Christian Aid, London 1992. Used with author's permission.

# Audit tool

## **Leadership: Evaluate the diversity of the congregation's leadership.**

- Does the congregation have a diverse group of people in positions of leadership and decision-making roles?
- Is the diversity of the congregation reflected in the leadership, and if not, why?

## **Membership: Assess the diversity of the congregation's membership.**

- Are people of ethnic minority or migrant background welcomed, represented and actively involved in the congregation?
- Are there any groups or cliques that may exclude minorities?

## **Is the congregation reflective of the diversity in the surrounding area? Worship Style: Consider the worship style of the congregation.**

- Does the congregation use worship styles that reflect the cultural backgrounds of people of ethnic minority or migrant background?
- In what ways can the experience of worshipping with others feel more inclusive of cultural difference?

## **Language: Explore how language shapes belonging in the congregation.**

- Is the language used in the congregation welcoming and inclusive to all cultures?
- Are church leaders confident in using inclusive and appropriate names for various cultural groups?
- Are Church resources available in languages other than English to support welcome and inclusion?

## **Outreach: Analyse the congregation's outreach efforts.**

- Does the congregation reach out to diverse communities and neighbourhoods?
- Can outreach work be made more inclusive and sensitive to different backgrounds and needs?

## **Events: Review typical events offered by your congregation.**

- What kinds of congregational events include diverse members?
- How open is your local congregation to suggestions for new or adapted events to be more inclusive to people of all cultures and backgrounds?

## **Education: Assess church educational resources for children and adults.**

- Does the congregation offer courses / programmes that acknowledge and respect cultural diversity?
- How can the congregation's resources better reflect the diversity of our society? Consider visual, audio and reading resources you use.

## **Relationships: Consider the relationships between congregation members.**

- Are people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds forming genuine relationships with each other?
- What relationships are built between your congregation and congregations in more / less ethnically diverse areas?

## **Policies: Evaluate the congregation's policies.**

- Are there policies that might unintentionally discriminate against people of ethnic minority or migrant background?
- Are there policies that actively promote diversity and inclusion?

## **Evaluation: Measure the success of your congregation's efforts.**

- What goals will you set in place to check progress towards diversity and inclusion goals?
- Who will check progress on these goals and report at your annual meeting?
- How will you share good practice with your wider Church or other congregation communities?

# Learning resources

## Websites

INAR, [Learn about racism in Ireland & Responding to Racism Guide](#)

The Irish Times, [New to the Parish series](#)

Bateman, F. [Africa and 'Blackness' in the Irish Imagination](#)

Fact-checking websites: [Factcheck from The Journal](#) (Ireland), [FactCheckNI](#) (Northern Ireland) and [Snopes](#) (international)

Sanctuary Movement Ireland, [Churches of Sanctuary](#)

Irish Refugee Council, [Tight Spaces – Children in Direct Provision](#)

Government of Ireland, [National Action Plan Against Racism](#)

Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality

## Books

Sally Hayden, [My Fourth Time, We Drowned](#)

Sorcha Pollack, [New to the Parish](#)

Melatu Uche Okorie, [This Hostel Life](#)

Harvey Kwiyani, [Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church.](#)

Malcolm Patten, [Leading a Multicultural Church.](#)

Chine McDonald, [God Is Not a White Man: And Other Revelations](#)

Anthony G. Reddie, [Is God Colour-Blind?: Insights from Black Theology for Christian Faith and Ministry.](#)

A.D.A France-Williams, [Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England](#)

Thaddeus J Williams, [Confronting Injustice Without](#)

[Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice](#)

Emma Dabiri, [What White People Can Do Next: from Allyship to Coalition](#)

Sherene Daniels, [The Anti-racist Organisation](#)

Reni Eddo-Lodge, [Why I'm no longer Talking to White People about Race](#)

## Books to read with children and young people

National Youth Council of Ireland, [Guide to working with young people on the issue of racism.](#)

[Beyond Hate Activity Pack for Youth Workers](#)

Baptist Union Racial Justice Group, [Wonderful Youth 'No Outsiders'](#)

Alexandra Penfold, illustrated by Suzanne Kaufman, [We Are All Neighbours](#) (early years)

Claire Heuchan and Nikesh Shukla, [What is Race? Who are Racists? Why Does Skin Colour Matter? And Other Big Questions](#) (for age 10 & up)

Oein DeBhairduin, [Why The Moon Travels](#) (bedtime stories for older children)

# Glossary of some useful terms

**Racism** is the description, in belief, speech or action, of groups as being essentially inferior or superior based on the idea of 'race'

**Anti-racism** is the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. Anti-racism includes individually opposing overtly racist behaviours and collectively opposing institutional racism.

**Colonisation** refers to forms of invasion, dispossession, and subjugation of people and territory as part of the expansion of imperial power and the development of a global capitalist economy, including by indirect or informal rule by trading companies with support of imperial powers. Colonialism introduced hierarchical divisions of people by race, religion, ethnicity, and tribe as a major means to organise and justify their rule over populations.

**Ethnicity** describes how people are categorised by characteristics such as shared sense of group membership, values, behavioural patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical base. People can share the same nationality but be of different ethnic groups and people who share an ethnic identity can be of different nationalities.

**Racialisation:** Processes that negatively label others using race as a label, also referred to as 'race making'.

**Xenophobia:** Attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify people based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity.

Member churches are encouraged to adopt and share this handbook with all in their congregations.

This handbook is produced by the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. We hope it enables you live more fully as members of the body of Jesus Christ alongside people from different cultures. We hope it will offer ways to reflect on diversity, discrimination and the role of Christians in building a world of Shalom. May it equip you to speak out about racial injustice and promote a vision for human flourishing and peace in this world and the one to come.

We welcome feedback on any aspect of this handbook. Whether the subject of anti-racism is new to you or not, we would like to hear from you. Please tell us about your experiences working with this handbook and how it has helped to make a difference.

If you are an experienced facilitator of discussions, you might consider offering guidance to others in your church through an event or article in your church magazine, social media pages or website. Please share those with us too.



[www.irishchurches.org](http://www.irishchurches.org)  
twitter: @irishchurches  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/churchesinireland](http://www.facebook.com/churchesinireland)





