3 Skills We Need for Conversation Around Race

(and How You Can Help Teach Them!)

**First Skill: RECEIVE** (Embracing the practice of “Deep Listening”, understanding empathy as a learned – and learnable - skill)

* We define “Deep Listening” as ***a process of listening to learn.*** It requires the temporary setting aside of judgment, and a willingness to receive new information – whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
* When we ‘listen to learn’ we can listen for understanding rather than just statements we can agree with, and develop the ability to ask powerful questions; that is, questions that put focus on what has meaning and possibility, require introspection and reflection, and inspire innovation. We can also choose our responses and statements with more care, and accountability for their impact.
* This practice allows us to share and receive stories with a lens toward cultural understanding, to build genuine relationships with those who may have different experiences, and to more genuinely respect the needs and experiences of members of marginalized groups as we work toward community-based solutions.
* Suggested activities: Practicing Deep Listening and Powerful Questions for Deep Listening activities, Empathy Bingo and additional empathy activities, listening panel of personal stories, Naming Stereotypes activity. See

<https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/kindness-activities-empathy-worksheets/> and <https://www.csh.umn.edu/education/focus-areas/whole-systems-healing/leadership/deep-listening>

**Second Skill: REFLECT** (Developing a fuller understanding of the realities shaping racism at play in our society and how that reality is experienced by our marginalized siblings. Examining our responsibility in addressing the communal sin of racism.)

* To do anti-racist work in any capacity, we must develop a basic understanding of the different ways that racism is exhibited in American society. This includes working definitions and real life examples of systemic racism, colorism, subtle racism, and internalized racism.
* To more fully comprehend the scope of how racism is experienced, it is important to grasp the realities of intersectionality with related struggles such as poverty, ableism, ageism, and genderism/sexism.
* With a more comprehensive grasp on the realities of racism in our community, we can better turn to relevant Biblical texts and commentary to explore what actions we may feel Biblically called to in response.
* Suggested activities: Privilege checklist like <http://crc-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/white-privilege.pdf>, poverty simulation, systemic racism videos (<https://www.raceforward.org/videos/systemic-racism>), small group break out to discuss gospel verses that could be interpreted as addressing racism to identify specific actions we are called to based on those verses (<https://www.openbible.info/topics/racism>)

**Third Skill: RESPOND** (Practicing “Active Ally-ship” within a church model)

* Defining anti-racism ally-ship as individuals who are not a member of a marginalized group taking active and practical steps to improve circumstances and outcomes for that group and challenging injustice that targets that group, we encourage churches and church members to identify as allies, and to embrace our own personal responsibility in self-education and action generation, allowing spaces for POC (people of color) input, without holding POC unduly responsible for justifying the work.
* To begin healing work regarding racial divide we must honestly confront and gain understanding about the church’s role in historic harms that may shape the way victims of racism will respond to our care and concern. Naming and taking accountability for our actions is generally included in introductory portions of social statements, but additional historical context or personal account may be helpful.
* Familiarization and confidence working with tools available within the ELCA including social statements and studies can be a useful way to begin conversations within congregations seeking an inclusive Biblical approach to addressing racism in our nation and our communities. Sharing real life examples/case studies of how congregations and people of faith have addressed racism in their local contexts is also an inspiring and useful practice.

Suggested Activities: Defining and exploring ally-ship (<http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/kivel3.pdf>) and the importance of ally leadership in that work (<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/for-white-allies-in-search-of-a-solution-to-american-racism-when-folks-of-color-are>). Small group break outs with various social statements or denominational tools regarding cultural or ethnic group awareness to identify past harm and current marginalization, call to actions, and a way an individual church could practically address the issue or use that tool.

Carla Christopher with Rev. Tim Seitz-Brown and Rev. Titus Clarke, Lower Susquehanna Synod