

across RACE

Leadership Conversations

by Rev. Dr. Malcolm Himschoot
with Rev. Dr. Renée C. Jackson

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A resource that will help Christians have healing conversations about the effects of racism in the pulpit and the pew in interracial and intercultural communities. Himschoot not only encourages conversation, but also provides caring suggestions to help pastors and their congregations to create beloved communities.

Tejai Beulah Howard, Assistant Professor of History, Ethics, and Black Church and African Diaspora Studies, Methodist Theological School in Ohio

“

As the white pastor of a predominantly white church, I have witnessed how easily mistrust and miscommunication can infect the church's relationship with a pastor of color. The perspectives from pastors of color that the author has gathered provide crucial insight and education for white church members. The conversational prompts consistently set the tone for open dialogue that is both challenging and life-giving.

Rev. Jane McBride
Ordained Minister, United Church of Christ

“

For those that follow through, a wonderfully transformative experience.

Rev. Dr. Renée C. Jackson,
Minister for Ministerial Formation, United Church of Christ

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

The content, function, and design of this Conversations workbook came from a consultative research process made possible through the initiative, insight, support, and accountability provided by the following people and organizations:

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Across Race: Leadership Conversations

Welcome

Welcome to Across Race: Leadership Conversations. We are so glad that you have chosen to journey with us. The guide that follows is rooted in faithful responsiveness to a movement, centuries in the making. This movement is calling churches founded in a white and Christian social location to a new kind of followership as we embody community together, recognizing the leadership of people of color among us — including pastors who are Black, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, biracial, and indigenous.

We write this guide specifically to you who are lay leaders in white-founded congregations, who in this historic context want to support your own congregation's work with the pastoral leader of color among you. We imagine that you are white, that you are familiar with decision-making in your congregation, and that you are perhaps serving on a specific committee to strengthen the relationship between pastor and congregation. For some churches this may be a standing committee; for others, a transitional group in consultation with the pastor. Please use this guide to foster research-based dialogue opportunities together, and share with others, so that informed conversation can grow and support cross-race ministry.

Across Race is based on the wisdom of fifteen interviews conducted with diverse pastors who wanted to share their leadership insights with a primarily white readership through a cross-case research study. We have sought to make available and distribute this collective wisdom so that your congregation can begin, further, and/or deepen your collective practices as led by the Spirit of God.

Introduction

Once upon a time, a pastor started in a church with happy prospects for ministry. The congregation had an incredible sense of care, and it sought a pastor to help build up its community and faithful witness through teaching, preaching, and worship leadership. This church—like one known to you—may either have received an appointed minister, or actively sought and called its minister through an elected search committee representing the congregation. Either way, they rejoiced when their new pastor started among them, anticipating years of partnership together.

It so happens that the pastor had a racialized identity, while most of the congregation was white. After a couple of years, stressors in the church not only claimed a large portion of the pastor's time, but they also added layers of exhaustion and depleted her ability to build relationships with and within the congregation. While not all of these stressors were rooted in race, many of them were, as racism has a complicated way of becoming woven into everything. The problem was, no one seemed willing—or able—to talk about that reality. The pastor felt alone in the conversation, even though many of the issues and dynamics that had surfaced were affecting the wellbeing of the church overall.

Many pastors report feeling isolated much like the one in this story, but the truth is that such pastors are not alone—church leaders across America are experiencing the same issues, and more so with each passing year. In fact, cross-race leadership is not new; peers and colleagues in ministry have been having informal conversations about race and leadership for a long time. Finding shared language for common experiences has helped many pastors be able to survive and thrive in fruitful work for decades, which has, in turn, enabled them to provide faithful ministry within and among their white-founded congregations.

The story of Christian leadership by the global non-white majority goes back 2000 years to the time of Jesus. It is not new.

What is new is the ever-increasing number of white church members in the United States who are eager to join the multi-racial conversation about leadership. Each year, more white people are hearing and responding to the invitation to join in dialogue and engage in ways that honor leaders of color and their extraordinary gifts. As a result, relationships are being formed at a deeper level and churches are being transformed. Christ is calling, and the Spirit is guiding congregations forward.

This book was birthed in response to ministers' request for a resource that could provide evidence-based points of conversation to help predominantly white churches talk about ministry in effective partnership across race. In 2021, I published a research study on this very topic. It was called "Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study." The ten sessions that are outlined in this book are based on the findings from that deep-dive into the role that race plays in pastoral leadership within white-founded faith communities.

I was approached to do this work, as a white person, based on my record of involvement in organizing grassroots racial justice work beyond the church. As an ordained minister I also have leadership experience within the church. I carry beliefs and commitments that compelled ministry even when barriers against my participation, as a trans man, were high. I spent several years working as a staff person with the denominational offices of the United Church of Christ (UCC) fulfilling a call to support church transitions and clergy installations in congregations, and to undo barriers to diversity in church life and leadership. It was there that I was urged to join colleagues of color and extend white responsibility and participation in the conversation that was already happening among ordained pastors who identify as Black, Latine, Asian, biracial, or non-white.

I am not the first researcher to identify cross-race pastoral experiences as a worthwhile area for study. Rather, there have been many pastors of color who have conducted doctoral research, including the Rev. Dr. Renée C. Jackson, a clergy colleague of African descent in the United Church of Christ. She, along with others who have pastored in predominantly-white settings, urged the use of a new

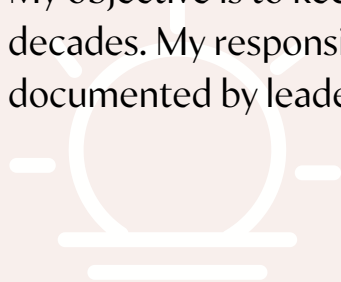
cross-case study format in order to systematize results and present findings, and that is what I have undertaken to accomplish here. Dr. Jackson also made sure the final version was connected to scripture in a way that would speak across denominational lines.

These findings do not—and are not meant to—generalize a single story about a broad array of unique and distinguished leaders of color. Rather, these findings lift up common insights about predominantly white Christian contexts that can be useful in a variety of leadership situations.

My research process involved conducting similar interviews with fifteen pastoral leaders and listening for narrative responses that would answer the qualitative research question: “What words, language, and images describe the leadership experiences of pastors of color in white-founded congregations?” Description of experience is qualitative—not quantitative—in nature. Interviews were transcribed and all comments were treated as data. Some aspects of the data had to be redacted to preserve confidentiality, but essential stories and insights from pastors were meant to be shared widely. In Across Race: Leadership Conversations, each session will begin with several quotations from the pastors involved in the study, to lift up their voices within and across ministry settings.

As part of my research methodology, I collated findings and double-checked with study participants to identify relevant topics for shared conversation. Pastors participating in the research study agreed that these categories are needed. Yes, they confirmed – amplify these themes! Their affirmation is not that I have necessarily gotten everything right, in content or methodology, but rather that this work is important for the Church’s ministry. Toward that end, God can use even partial and in-progress contributions as ingredients for the good bread that Jesus is baking.

My objective is to keep the conversation going across congregations and across decades. My responsibility is to make the learnings that have already been documented by leaders of color available to white-founded churches.



How to Use this Resource

The best time to build a common vocabulary between pastoral leader and congregation is during the first two years in ministry together. This vocabulary can encompass language for sharing understandings about leadership and teamwork, theology and spirituality in the life of the church. To promote partnership and longevity in a pastorate across race, this vocabulary in a congregation should also lift up aspects of culture, identity, and support for a minister, alongside race, equity, power and purpose in the life and calling of the Church.

For congregations who already have an established a relationship with their minister(s), the process of reinvesting in a shared vocabulary will define an intentional period of deepening that relationship.

The following tools and resources are designed to guide intentional conversations in ten parts between you (as a lay leader), your minister, and a small, designated group from your congregation. The schedule of ten conversations provided in Across Race: Leadership Conversations can occur monthly over the course of one year, or in a more condensed format within a three-month period. This book provides a template for an initial invitation to form a group, then ten conversation prompts, and a final personal debrief.

Please note: Conversations #7 and #10 are perennial conversations. They are related to fairness in compensation and vocational support and can be revisited annually.

As you begin, may your relationships and purpose be led by the Spirit, and may God bless you to the work.

Forming Your Dialogue Group

This ten-part series will help a group of people from your congregation, together with your minister, explore theological and practical dimensions of ecclesial leadership across race.

One convener of the group might send an email invitation based on the questions at the end of this chapter. Include a personalized invitation based on the template provided. Provide a link to a full version of the Across Race: Leadership Conversations resource so that each participant can access a copy.

Each time the group meets, consider sending a group email ahead of time that contains the relevant reading for that session.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

read

“

It's so very important to lift up the stories, to be in conversation. For me at the end of the day, it's important that the hearing affirms the basic humanity of all God's people.

“

What does it mean for me as a pastor to come from a different cultural context and serve a community that's different, particularly when my cultural context comes from a marginalized community?

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

“

Help open conversation about the different alternatives of building an anti-racist church and the need to open up new possibilities for growth.

“

[The value of this study is] to name and bring to light the institutional realities that we minister within.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

reflect

Quotations above come from a research study incorporating a series of fifteen semi-structured interviews with pastors of color from many places and stages. What did they have in common? They all had one or more leadership experiences pastoring in a white-founded congregation of the United Church of Christ. Today, their congregations may be predominantly white, completely white, or multiracial. These pastors' insights offer illumination, support, and accountability toward other churches' efforts to form a ministry partnership across race for the good of their community.

The opportunity ahead of you is to convene a group of people at your church who desire to take a proactive learning approach toward ten ministry topics that were identified as important by pastors of color in the qualitative research study, "Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study." The dialogue will be founded on pastors' reflections after combined decades of experience leading in white-founded congregations. When it comes to the many topics connected to race, it is helpful to have specific language that promotes shared understanding among whites and leaders of color.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

How to Get Started

1 Talk with your pastor (who may identify as a person of color, non-white, or something more specific) to ensure that they want to use time this year to have such a conversation. Describe the series:

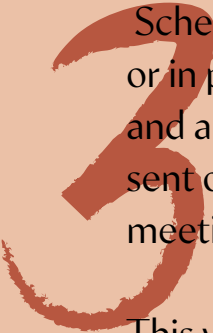
It will be ten conversation starters about ten research-based topics, with participant narratives, short reflections, and discussion questions to use when the group meets together.

The topics are named below, and can be previewed together. Ask the questions:

Is this a helpful series for where your congregation is right now? Does this feel supportive to your pastor?

2 Talk with your pastor about the group and prayerfully discern who to convene. A dialogue group is made of 3-7 members who will journey together for a year for the purpose of deepening the partnership within the ministerial relationship between a pastor and congregation. It could be a standing group such as a Pastoral Relations Committee, or a dedicated ad hoc group including past and present council presidents/moderators. In addition to formal roles in your church, consider informal leaders with influence, both young and old. If applicable on a multi-clergy team, include the

other pastors. Extend invitations and confirm willingness and availability to participate. Is it feasible for your small group to meet monthly, or ten times, across the course of a year?



Schedule group meetings. Your group could meet either virtually or in person. Plan for monthly meetings to last between an hour and an hour and a half. Materials for each conversation should be sent out to all members of the group prior to each monthly meeting.

This will be a defined opportunity for the designated group to listen and build a deeper relationship with your pastor. This investment of time and energy is meant to support wholeness in your community, to promote the long-term health and flourishing of your pastor's ministry, and to prevent unwanted pastoral transition.

This dialogue series should feel like a learning space that builds mutual support for the work of ministry, lifts up sacred dimensions of church life and leadership, and faces the historic challenges that are confronting Christ's church today.

assess

Here is a list of the ten topics that will be covered during your monthly meetings. As you review them and begin to prepare for this learning opportunity, what are you excited about? What's making you nervous?

- Identity
- Theology (Ecclesiology)
- Cultural Navigation
- Racism
- Talking within the Congregation about Racism
- Preaching
- Exhaustion
- The Call
- Pastoral Care with White People
- Support and Intervention

Invitation Template

Dear _____,

We currently have an exciting opportunity to form a dialogue group with our pastor around topics of race in the context of leadership. The goal is to spend a year deepening our understanding together using shared vocabulary from the workbook Across Race: Leadership Conversations. This workbook is based on “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study,” a research study relevant to the experience of pastors of color in white-founded U.S. Christian congregations. We believe it is much better for us to be in the conversation together than for our pastor to have the full burden of addressing these issues all by themselves. To quote pastors from the research study:

“

It’s so very important to lift up the stories, to be in conversation. For me at the end of the day, it’s important that the hearing affirms the basic humanity of all God’s people.

“

What does it mean for me as a pastor to come from a different cultural context and serve a community that’s different, particularly when my cultural context comes from a marginalized community?

Pastor _____ is open to meeting with a group of lay leaders, including [names of other potential participants], once a month for ten months. As you review the material provided [attached - or include a link to the book], I look forward to hearing from you.

Invitation Questions

Can you commit to ten meetings over the next twelve months (1+ hour/meeting)?

Will you prepare by receiving and reading one chapter prior to each meeting (15 minutes)?

What is your hope for joining the conversation about pastoral leadership and the church based on a cross-case research study lifting up the voices of pastors of color?

CONVERSATION 1

identity

Read this chapter in advance, as it will be used as a conversation starter when you gather for your first small group meeting. All quotations come from fifteen clergy who participated in “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study.”

read

“

I encountered a former pastor of the church who said—just this summer—‘I never thought of you as a Black woman, as a person of color.’ I’m still Brown... Because they knew someone who looked like me, I have to ask, ‘Which culture are you talking about? What assumptions are you making?’

“

People assume that because I’m a Latino, I crossed the border in my life, or that I’m illegal. They assume that I dance salsa. Or they assume that I eat tacos every week. There are a lot of assumptions.

“

In some cases, the fact that we have broken English, or our accent is kind of a thick accent, makes [for] a lot of assumptions.

“

I remember my father saying, ‘Son, I want you to go and get an education.’ He said, ‘I want you to go to college and get an education NOT so you will just be able to speak to Black people; I want you to be able to preach to ALL KINDS of people.’ That sort of rang in me. I thought, ‘This will be the challenge.’

“

For me it’s always intersectional, because my queerness is never separated from my Blackness.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

reflect

Identity can be a bridge between people in community, but it can also be a moat around a heavily guarded castle.

Wherever differences remain assumed or unspoken, people might default to harmful messages they have heard in the past, including shame, discomfort, or danger. But wherever differences are spoken aloud with the intention of listening and learning, diversity can be not only appreciated, but also nuanced and honored.

The fact is, we are all different—and many of those differences were created by God! Our families and ancestors, languages and dialects, cultures, geography, and beautiful features—they all make us who we are, acting as unique parts of our identities that come into focus at different moments like images flashing in a kaleidoscope. Our bodies, sexuality, relationships, experiences, and our heritage are all gifts reflecting God’s creative abundance in this diverse world. As one early theologian shared, “From one person God created every human nation to live on the whole earth... God made the nations so they would seek him, perhaps even reach out to him and find him. In fact, God isn’t far away from any of us” (Acts 17:26-27, Common English Bible).

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We would not be who we are without each having a particular family lineage and particular stories in our lives. In a community of faith, we learn about one another's unique facets of identity to celebrate these gifts given by our Creator.

We also must acknowledge that some differences among us were not created by God, but reflect centuries of pain from inequitable history. Consider race, for example.

Race is often harder for white people to talk about than other kinds of differences. Scholars have analyzed why that is and rely on history for an explanation—especially the past five centuries when Europeans and Euro-Americans promoted enslavement, displacement, and even genocide in terms of “race.”[1] In history, race is not about discovering biological differences but rather imposing political disparities. One way to say it: Race was invented by white people, not God, when what white people wanted was to take from non-white people their resources of labor, land, and productivity. Without mutual exchange or guiding human sensitivity, race was itself the idea of categorical superiority for “whites.” Racism was everything that systematized and normalized this idea, resulting in benefits for whites, but harmful impacts for non-whites.

Given that history, of course it is difficult to talk about race!

To make matters worse, racism remains interconnected with marginalization and impoverishment of many kinds. Class and poverty—even within white communities—represent systems of

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

taking and taking, without space for Spirit-led encounter. Sexism and homophobia exclude people in a way that Jesus would not, for “there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, CEB). All of these dynamics operate simultaneously in a global web of cultural and economic colonialism, and they are intersectional, meaning that our efforts to solve diversity issues will also raise the need to work against injustice.

To begin, your group has gathered to build vocabulary around diversity and to cultivate your attention to leadership across the societal divide of race.

This ten-part dialogue with your pastor is a worthwhile part of your commitment to one another and to the leadership of Jesus in a white-majority church. At this month’s meeting, take time to hear from each person in your group. Enter a conversation about wholeness by naming, as you are able, diverse aspects of your own identity.

[1] See Jennifer Harvey, Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014). Additional resources including films and curricula made for small groups are found under “For Further Study” at the end of this guide.

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discuss

1 Our ice-breaker question is credited to the 20th century African American human rights activist and racial justice teacher Vincent Harding, as a way to deepen community by sharing stories in a multi-racial group. Please share with your group: What was your mama's mama's name?

2 Pastors of color sometimes have to correct others' assumptions about their identity, education, or credentials in majority-white spaces in order to build a relationship with authenticity and integrity. How does this apply in your context?

assess

You have gathered for the first time as part of this ten-part process with your pastor. As you discussed “identity” in your small group, some differences were probably easy to name, and others may have been harder to speak of. How much did your conversation expand the vocabulary of the people involved? How do concepts of intersectionality, diversity, and power differentials matter in your community?

for the convener

Make sure to check in with your pastor to reassess timing and participation as needed.

next up

- Theology (Ecclesiology)
- Cultural Navigation
- Racism
- Talking in the Congregation about Racism
- Preaching
- Exhaustion
- The Call
- Pastoral Care with White People
- Support and Intervention

CONVERSATION 2

theology (ecclesiology)

Read this chapter in advance, as it will be used as a conversation starter when you gather for your second small group meeting. All quotations come from fifteen clergy who participated in “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study.”

read

“

There's some reason that we—pastor and people—are together for this period of time. So let's try to do whatever that is.

“

Being able to be honest and true to the Gospel shifts the ways in which we're able to show up.

“

The Gospel is an equalizing force.

“

We are determined to be followers of Jesus.

reflect

“Ecclesiology” is not a word that everybody knows. It comes from Christian tradition and it means “what the church is all about!”

Why would a body of people gather, experience the Spirit together and be sent out in Jesus’ name, to love this world as God loves it? The answer to that question lives in our faith story of beginnings, and is newly refashioned in each generation through teaching, action, care, ritual, and sacrament.

Ordained ministers are part of the church’s ecclesiology. Those who are ordained by the church steward long-held, global practices of teaching, baptizing, and sharing communion with others for the sake of the church being the church. These ministers are connected to other ordained ministers through lifetime service, vows, and prayer. Pastoral leaders specifically make a commitment to the church’s non-ordained members, those who continually are called out (ekklesia) on the Way of Christ to live their baptismal vows in the world.

Pastors of color who minister in white-founded congregations spoke to a researcher about some key ecclesiological beliefs which compelled them to engage parish ministry across race.[2]

Pastors felt led to:

- Practice community with relationships of repair and grace
- Build up active membership and participation in a congregation
- Welcome any and all of God's children, and
- Live out Christ-shaped hospitality and shalom

Ministry for the sake of the Gospel joins clergy and lay folks together in a group project called “church.” Sharing the spiritual inheritance of Jesus, and relying on the help of God, members and pastors of a church might do unique and numerous different functions in various contexts, depending on circumstances. Though job descriptions may vary, together they work on visible things, toward invisible things. Ministry is sacred work.

Notwithstanding such a high and holy calling, the church is full of human beings, who are not God. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was one preacher who noted just how short the visible church falls in comparison to God's “beloved community.” Pastors accompanying God's people often manage to love the church anyway. Despite the fact that all fall short, leaders claim the promise which lies ahead. They guide a communal endeavor toward spiritual experience based on faith in a saving and liberating God.

In partnership led by the Holy Spirit, pastors and congregants manage to build up a church that is quite different from other institutions that exploit or oppress people.

“Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:5-6, CEB).

[2] Findings are derived from a doctoral study by Malcolm Himschoot which forms the basis of Across Race: Leadership Conversations, published in summary form as: “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study,” 2021.

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discuss

1 How is Christ's church meant to be different from institutions that exploit and oppress people?

2 How do you understand the role of a Christian pastor for the life of the church?

assess

This is your second gathering as part of this ten-part process of discussing aspects of leadership with your pastor. To discuss “theology” can sound intimidating, but in truth everyone has important questions, personal convictions, and ideas worth sharing. Within your group are everyone’s voices heard?

next up

- Cultural Navigation
- Racism
- Talking within the Congregation about Racism
- Preaching
- Exhaustion
- The Call
- Pastoral Care with White People
- Support and Intervention

CONVERSATION 3

cultural navigation

Read this chapter in advance, as it will be used as a conversation starter when you gather for your third small group meeting. All quotations come from fifteen clergy who participated in “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study.”

read

“

I had to be frank with folks who thought that having a pastor of color would draw more people of color.

“

Social norms are different in white communities. If my children were still of school age, they would be dealing with things in a setting totally different. It surely would have added some dynamics to the mix.

“

I had to let them know, ‘You will have to culturally shift.’ I’m not going to completely assimilate.

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“

We have to learn a different kind of language when we're forming relationships across those divides. Our experiences won't always speak to each other.

“

In my culture, hospitality means a lot. If I have welcomed you into this space, and nothing about me has changed, I actually have not welcomed you.

“

Receive a person for the gifts that they bring, without expecting them to abandon who they are.

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“

How do you honor or cultivate the tradition, culture, and unique practices of your own culture or ethnic group? I intentionally try to keep cultivating my own ethnicity here.

“

The community I'm serving, at one point in time there was a great divide between the Germans and the Italians. Some folk in the church can relate to feeling excluded because of their own heritage.

reflect

Pastors in a research study across race expressed a tension between being open and adaptive to the culture of a congregation, and also being oneself and intentional about one's own cultural heritage.[1] By naming that experience, they hoped that people of their congregation would similarly open themselves to a process of awareness and recognition of their own culture and engage the possibility of change in encounter.

Cultural formation is almost unconscious. It happens without people necessarily learning skills for how to talk about it. As a result, it is typically those who have navigated multiple cultures the most, who most develop those skills! Pastors of color serving white-founded congregations balanced what they themselves felt they would give up, versus what they challenged their faith community to take on.[3]

Some pastors found themselves educating white church members on cultural differences, values, and possibilities. In addition to music and food and holidays, they helped congregations interpret things like worship choices, orientation to time, patterns in community relationship, and styles of conflict.

Any process of learning between cultures is not linear. Some of the best insights occur after noticing assumptions and missed communication!

NOTE: Cultural differences do not correlate with categories of race, for many reasons. The same pastor (of any race, of any gender, of any age) might make different leadership choices on different occasions. When cultural differences are perceived as racial, it shows limited exposure to a variety of individuals and a variety of customs.

All cultures can embody the Gospel; the wider Christian church has been multicultural and intercultural for thousands of years, starting on the day of Pentecost when Peter proclaimed, “The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls” (Acts 2:39, CEB). In that vein, some pastors in the research study helped their churches create a new culturally-specific ministry. Others bridged between white and non-white communities to create a multicultural ministry. Most, however, faithfully tended to their white congregation, because demographics of their area were not changing. Whatever the case, pastors found it was important for church members to test their assumptions about cultural navigation by talking together.

What can be talked about, can be worked through.

[3] All subsequent research study references are taken from Malcolm Himschoot, “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study,” 2021.

discuss

1

Which quotes from pastors could you relate to?

2

Within your church, who is best situated to perceive implicit social and cultural norms? Who gets a say in creating new norms?

3

What can your pastor do to help connect theology and faith with cultural relevance in your area?

assess

This is your third gathering as part of this ten-part process of discussing aspects of leadership with your pastor. What do you appreciate most so far? What feels overwhelming? Can you think of teams or committees in your church that would benefit from working more with cultural navigation?

next up

- Racism
- Talking within the Congregation about Racism
- Preaching
- Exhaustion
- The Call
- Pastoral Care with White People
- Support and Intervention

CONVERSATION 4

racism

Preconceptions about what is ‘natural,’ ‘normal,’ and ‘standard’ can limit us from learning more about a deeply transcendent faith. Last week your small group session considered culture and cultural navigation in the present. This week, see if your group is open to learning more of the history of race and racism, including in the church. Read this chapter in advance, and, with your pastor and small group, decide how you will use the time this month in conversation.

read

“

I started one interim where the Klan had marched the year before. That was fun.

“

The deacon one morning found the n-word. People had rearranged the letters on the church sign board. We don't know who.

“

Racism is very strong. The general pattern comes from slavery.

“

It was the 60th anniversary of the fight to integrate the city. I was at a meeting where there was one other Black pastor. His commentary: “What happened in 60 years? The city was less than 2% diversity then, and it’s less than 2% diversity now.”

“

Security. What does “security” even mean? From whom are we securing ourselves?

“

White men do not have to be as good at things. They don’t. We have to be better.

“

My experience is when they actually are confronted with some of the racism we encounter, they try to minimize the experience.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

“

Some people assumed that the one other person of color at the church was my son's father!

“

I had a horribly racist and sexist response from a colleague.

“

There's a suspicion about educational attainment, wondering if my education isn't as good as someone who comes out of an Anglo context.

“

Often when you're leading predominantly white congregations, you don't have safe places within your congregation. At all.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

“

I was livid about Ferguson and made comments on Facebook about what kind of stand I wish the church would make. Comments I got back included, ‘I just think we can’t say,’ ‘We haven’t heard it all,’ and ‘We don’t know.’ I told myself that’s important information for me—the not believing people of color.

“

One had to beware.

“

In my everyday walking-around life I encounter the fear of immigrants in a concrete way that catches me off guard.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

reflect

One stumbling block to the mutual encounter, learning, and exchange between people of different cultures and features has been the very real impact of colonization and slavery.

With that in mind, it is important to realize that the good news of the Gospel did not start “white.” Historically, neither did Christians of European descent![4] Rather, a terrible legacy of whites claiming the land, labor, and economic resources of nonwhites began during modern centuries. This legacy traces to a 15th century divine mandate (as interpreted by the Doctrine of Discovery) that constructed a category of “whiteness” as normal, natural, good — and profitable.[5] Instead of an experience of sacred difference in mutual relationship, race became a violent pretext for global control and assimilation. The racist impacts of this history are still handed down today, through governments, laws, institutions, and policies; and also through personal prejudice and discrimination between people in families and neighborhoods.

It would be nice if congregations of worship and communities of faith were immune to the larger society, but they are not.

Some aspects of racism were and still are recreated within Christian churches in ways that are not safe but impede the process of transformation toward God’s love. White-founded churches —like other predominantly-white organizations —are not immune to patterns of bias in the placement, treatment, and evaluation of leaders of color.

Pastors of color in white-founded congregations encounter incidents of racism routinely. Above are just a few of the many comments from pastors in a cross-case research study related to racism in their experience of ministry.

[4] This statement may provoke at first glance confusion, because of embedded assumptions around whiteness, around the Bible, and narratives of European ancestry. These assumptions deserve examination. White racial categories do not occur in scripture, nor in the first 1500 years of recorded history among Christians of various language and ethnic and national groups.

[5] Racial categories began to be narrated in modern times in the course of transnational colonialism and slavery. Once “white” was established, this category was read backwards into western Christian texts and thought. It was used going forward in American jurisprudence and culture. A reference list at the end of this book suggests films and books for learning more about 500+ continuing years of racism.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

discuss

1 What emotions arose for each person in your group as you read through the pastors' quotes this week?

2 What connections can you make between the historical and societal context for white Christian control, and the learned behaviors of people in your own community?

3 Which behaviors or assumptions do you personally want to unlearn?

assess

This is your fourth gathering as part of this ten-part process of discussing aspects of leadership with your pastor. Please write and share a prayer for your pastor.

next up

- Talking within the Congregation about Racism
- Preaching
- Exhaustion
- The Call
- Pastoral Care with White People
- Support and Intervention

CONVERSATION 5

talking within the congregation about racism

Read this chapter in advance, as it will be used as a conversation starter when you gather for your fifth small group meeting. All quotations come from fifteen clergy who participated in “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study.”

read

“

If you, here, use the word ‘racism,’ it usually triggers very negative emotions. Racism itself is very negative. It’s charged with a lot of history. There’s a lot of pain.

“

Of course, we’re nice people. And also—we inherited some really crappy stuff. So what are we going to do about that so we don’t keep passing it forward to future generations?

“

Racism is pervasive and it is everywhere. To pretend like it is not does not mean it is not true. So how do we gird up our loins and delve into those places?

“

I'm honest with people. Know that your feelings at some point will be hurt, and mine will too. And we can hang in there with each other.

“

You have to be centered and grounded in order to do that, and correct it or address it however you need to address it.

“

Some churches are more 'white' than others in terms of being open to discuss issues of racism.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

reflect

In some churches founded by a white community, it is left up to the pastor of color to bring up talking about issues of race and racism. If not for that, nobody would mention it.

Those of us who are white might prefer to keep quiet about race, even though hundreds of years have brought us to this present moment where many of our thoughts, attitudes, fears, inequities, disparities, impacts, outcomes, and experiences reflect conditions that would not exist, if not for racism.

It's important to be able to talk about these realities, and to talk about them in a way that promotes healing in the presence of God and the kindred of faith.

“A nation or society cannot simply block out a chapter of its history or deny the facts of its past... There is always a record or someone that gives evidence to the truth. Yet this in fact is what ignoring the legacy of race in American society, and Christian churches in particular, attempts to accomplish. Such denial is futile and dangerous.

— Rev. Dr. Renée C. Jackson

However, for a pastor of color to be the lead teacher on these issues creates a multiplied burden for that individual. First, it's an expectation beyond what a white pastor would be expected to do, so in terms of sheer workload, it's more. Second, on a human level it's a topic that touches historical trauma and personal pain that not everyone wants to expose on a day-to-day basis. Third, it's work that a white congregation might expect but resist at the same time, and if so, it becomes a difficult/stuck place for a leader. Fourth, white folks experiencing intense feelings about racism may distance and blame the pastor for their feelings.

Nonetheless, some pastors at times feel drawn toward becoming more involved in the conversation, and they select tools and resources to help a congregation address racism and white supremacy in—or beyond—the congregation. It is important to note that this is not every pastor, and it is not every time. Rather, answering the call requires discernment. Each pastor seeks in different ways to build up their community's capacity to live out faith formation, discipleship, and justice in this world that God loves.

There are many leaders (not just pastors) who work beyond the church to provide consultation around diversity, equity, inclusivity, and justice. It might help the church's focus to invite in such facilitators to have an intentional and sustained conversation about race and racism. If it's determined that a consultative process would be beneficial to the congregation, key voices of influence within the congregation's membership should engage the process and lead by example and support. In this way, more and more white people will be invited to join a multi-racial

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

conversation and will learn how to notice and interrupt assumptions, behaviors, and structures that could harm future generations.

Sometimes talking about racism will expose just how much there is left to do. This work is ongoing. It will never be done. But the value of talking about it (rather than not talking about it at all) is to be able to cultivate capacity for important problems to be addressed, so the work of the Spirit can go onward.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

discuss

1 “When you know better, do better.” No one is ever perfect, but everyone is always learning. What resources can your church consult for insight on racial justice?

2 Whose responsibility is it to make such insights and efforts an ongoing part of your congregation’s life of faith in God?

assess

This was your fifth gathering as part of this ten-part process of discussing aspects of leadership with your pastor. Five sessions remain. Review the calendar you have set as a group for the remaining sessions. Revisit your specific purpose of strengthening the partnership between your pastor and congregation.

next up

- Preaching
- Exhaustion
- The Call
- Pastoral Care with White People
- Support and Intervention

CONVERSATION 6

preaching

Read this chapter in advance, as it will be used as a conversation starter when you gather for your sixth small group meeting. All quotations come from fifteen clergy who participated in “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study.”

read

“

They have said my sermons are too political.

“

The goal is not to reprimand or tear down. It's always to give life.

“

Politically we may not be on the same page. We may not be on the same page with some ideology. But theologically (for the most part) we are on the same page. These people love Jesus, and are trying to serve God out of the best of who they are.

“

[It comes down to] one's theology and being clear about that. What do you believe God says about race?

“

Being able to tell some stories out of my context, I can do so in a way that elicits similar experiences in other people's context.

reflect

The ministry of the pulpit is sometimes a conversation-starter, and is at other times a response to conversation. Sometimes it is a teaching moment, and often it is a healing moment. The work of preaching from Scripture connects speaker and listener in prayer and transformation before the Living God. When race and racism are real and raw in the life of an American community, how a preacher preaches—and how that preacher is heard in a predominantly-white congregation—can be very different things.

One story was told by a pastor who often quoted both the Bible and the newspaper. After a high-profile court verdict, his community was on edge. A judge had ruled for police impunity after a white officer killed an unarmed Black man. The pastor was Black, had Black children, and said in a sermon that he felt concern for his son. In a white-majority congregation with several people in law enforcement, the topic of his sermon touched a nerve. Some lay leaders called a special meeting to see if they needed to limit the freedom of the pulpit in some way. In this congregational meeting, one white elder's voice made all the difference.

The pastor tells it this way: “When she spoke, people listened. She said, ‘Now all y’all know me. I’ve been in this church a long time. There’s no way we can expect our pastor’s response to this

verdict to be the same as ours, because he has been in places we haven't been.' Her comment changed everything.”

This church member honored the life experience and humanity of the person who stood in the pulpit. Undoubtedly, she had seen pastors come and go during her time. On this occasion she encouraged a listening posture from the congregation, so that they could benefit from the ministry of a pastor who was able to share something different from what they already knew.

Pastoral ministry is so much more than preaching. Ephesians states that the mission of the job is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12, CEB). One component of a pastor’s work is preaching, listening for what God will say in a community, and teaching the community how to employ that message in ministry. A related component is accompanying real human beings with a pastor’s own individual presence. No two pastors will be present the same way, to hear and deliver the same message, at the same moment; nor should they be. In our collective diversity is found God’s care for the body of Christ.

discuss

1 How are unique pastors able to share Christ's message differently, and how is that a good thing?

2 When have you been touched, and when have you been challenged, by a sermon related to current events?

assess

This was your sixth gathering as part of this ten-part-month process of discussing aspects of leadership with your pastor. Among the stories you have heard, what does the group feel good about sharing more widely? The next few sessions shed light on behind-the-scenes aspects of ministry and a pastor's calling.

next up

- Exhaustion
- The Call
- Pastoral Care with White People
- Support and Intervention

CONVERSATION 7

exhaustion

Read this chapter in advance, as it will be used as a conversation starter when you gather for your seventh small group meeting. All quotations come from fifteen clergy who participated in “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study.”

read

“

Everything I did was judged all the time. People’s comments and criticisms were unending.

“

They expect you to do whatever white people expect you to do. You can play that game. But it’s exhausting. Pleasing white people all the time.

“

It gets weary when we’re always the ones (when I say ‘we,’ the marginalized community)—when we’re always the ones reaching out or extending the olive branch or trying to build the bridge.

“

I'm embodying pretty much all the main issues of society: economic issues, poverty, race, gender, sexuality, even coming from an immigrant family. So having the difficulty of trying to speak a universal truth through my particularities without making it be about my particularities is an exhausting dance to do.

“

Largely white folks in our denomination are like, 'Was it stressful the other day?' It's even exhausting to answer that question.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

reflect

As mentioned previously, this discussion series is based on a qualitative cross-case research study of leadership experiences by pastors of color in white-founded congregations. Some ministers had positive experiences in their churches, and some ministers had both good and troubling experiences. But every single minister mentioned the common experience of exhaustion!

The exhaustion did not come from the fact of being a person of color. Rather, participants shared that they took delight in their identities as African Americans, persons of African and Caribbean descent, Chicano and Latin Americans, Asian Americans, and biracial persons. They drew strength from their various communities. Exhaustion, however, came from dealing with dynamics of U.S. churches within the white community.

This is crucial for decision-makers in white-founded congregations to understand. Even a well-meaning, spiritually-growing, increasingly aware and active congregation contains challenges that are hazardous to the physical, mental, and emotional health of leaders of color.[6]

To combat exhaustion, here are practical tools that pastors suggested to one another in this research study:

- Therapy (as a paid employment benefit)
- Spiritual director (as a paid employment benefit)
- Place and time for personal retreat, private retreat, or silent retreat
- Home church membership in another congregation
- Connection to one's own pastor elsewhere
- Collegial connections with other ministers in similar roles
- Coaches or mentors with similar backgrounds
- Prayer practice

The above list would be good to consult at the time of employment, and/or in the annual review of compensation details by the church and minister. A church can help by understanding a pastor's needs to get away on vacation and retreat, by paying for continuing education, counseling, coaching, and/or spiritual direction, and by supporting and encouraging each pastor's connections to colleagues elsewhere.

[6] Even this guide *Across Race: Leadership Conversations* is an example of a hazardous challenge. The intention may be an ethical intention, and the outcome might be effective for addressing disparities noted by leaders of color in white-founded churches. Yet the fact remains that the whole premise of the guidebook includes a white interlocutor "whitesplaining" what others have said, so as to be heard by a white audience. This is a micro-aggression in itself: one small hurt that reinforces a very large oppression. A pastor can be hurt by this. It would be better for voices of color to be heard in white spaces without white interpretation and the need for white reinforcement. In the meantime, of course, it is just as problematic for a white person to let issues of racial harm play out without attempting to name them, or to name them without amplifying the perspective of those directly affected. This complicated footnote reminds us that hazards exist from white dynamics no matter what, and the health of pastors of color is likely to be affected.

discuss

1 What do you imagine is sublime and what do you imagine is difficult about the role and work of a pastor?

2 From the list above, how can your church help implement more structural support to replenish pastoral energy after exhaustion?

assess

This was your seventh gathering as part of this ten-part process of discussing aspects of leadership with your pastor. Devoting attention to pastoral wellbeing is connected to supporting a thriving life for the church within God's care. What did you learn about the boundaries, time, and resources that make care possible for your pastor?

next up

- The Call
- Pastoral Care with White People
- Support and Intervention

CONVERSATION 8

the call

Read this chapter in advance, as it will be used as a conversation starter when you gather for your eighth small group meeting. All quotations come from fifteen clergy who participated in “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study.”

read

“

I've been invited both by people and by God into ministry. I have decided to accept that invitation.

“

I was ordained, and the title on my certificate was Minister of Christ. When I accepted that invitation or made those vows, at that moment and forever and ever, Christ became the head of my life, my motivation for all of the things that I do.

“

Ultimately my agenda is the same thing I think that Jesus was telling us about. I'm called to serve in the setting that I'm in, to proclaim the Gospel and to help people be better disciples, and to bring the kingdom of God closer to where we are.

“

Leaders in the church recognize there are some things happening in our community that may be precipitated by that church's bravery in calling a person of color.

“

It was like an experiment. What would happen with these people if we would partner together?

“

I believe the Holy Spirit has led and guided all of my career. It wasn't because of me, or anything I did. It was an opportunity that God was creating for me.

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“

I don't accept a position unless I very much feel called to it.

“

It's the Holy Spirit's fault! I had a role in it, yes, but there's a bigger hand playing here that both of us [pastor and congregation] need to be reminded of as we're working our way forward.

“

I responded to the call. I did the very best I could. So I would say that God was with me, and is still with me, in the midst of the difficulties I've been through.

“

I believe ... that God is always calling. God calls us not just to one thing but—over the course of our lives—to many things.

reflect

Last month, your group talked about pastoral exhaustion. If you surmised that exhaustion can often lead to burnout and minister attrition, you were right!

Pastors don't just need a 'Sunday nap' or face the occasional 'Monday hangover.' Rather, spiritual leaders who work within invisible realities can succumb to seasons of just wanting to give up. Unfortunately, many do, including some pastors of color who sense it would be better for them to follow the Spirit of God outside of the white-normed church.

To encourage retention of ministers in the pastoral vocation, one powerful remedy against depletion is nourishing the belief in God's call. One's "call to ministry" is an internal call before it is externally affirmed. It can be cultivated by God over the course of years and decades even in the face of confusion, human resistance, neglect, and damage.

Caring for the vocation of ministry itself was mentioned by leaders of color as a source of essential support for their work of pastoring. Their words and images—sourced in divine passion and the Holy Spirit—gushed forth as they explained how vital it was to have sustenance in God's presence. Speaking about their calling evoked commitment, courage, faith, compassion, and care that pastors could feel and extend within their congregations.

Each person from the study had their own expression of belief in what is possible with God's help. New generations undoubtedly will be attracted to that call. Meanwhile some current pastors will (while others will not) reaffirm their dedication to the communion table, equipping those who gather to live out the vows of the baptized.

discuss

1 Reflect on what you promised or what was promised on your behalf at the time of your baptism. What—and who—has since helped equip you to live out your baptismal vows?

2 Picture a visual image or meme representing your church's ministry right now in history. What illustrates the sense of purpose held by your community and your pastor? What descriptive caption could you add?

assess

This was your eighth gathering as part of this ten-part process of discussing aspects of church life and leadership with your pastor. Think back on how your sense of faith and life with God have deepened in a personal sense.

next up

- Pastoral Care with White People
- Support and Intervention

CONVERSATION 9

pastoral care with white people

This session continues work begun in Session #5: Talking about Racism in the Congregation. Those who are ready to talk more deeply about emotion, harm, and healing in the aftermath of white supremacy can benefit from this session.

read

“

You can be a neighbor of somebody. You can be a colleague at work. But if you allow them to be your pastor, that's a whole different relationship. So there's something else going on in that exchange that's bigger than either of us.

“

[As a white person] your soul is in the game. If you take your theology seriously and if you take your faith seriously, you have some serious work to do.

“

[I] could observe what they are afraid of as a white person. Because almost always, somewhere in this layer, I have to figure out what they either most want to identify with, or what they're most afraid of!

“

You've got to pastor people through the fact that they're not the heroes they hoped they would be.

“

It's significant in those congregations to interact with children, so that their images of what they see and know to be 'normal' gets shaped in a very different fashion than it would have otherwise.

“

I'm always so grateful in those kinds of places that the children will be observers of all this.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

reflect

Research with pastors in cross-race settings suggests that white adults have existing racial biases, but that children are still forming their notions. Young white people who interact with the global majority in positions of leadership can shape a different mental model of what a leader is and does. This model is more expansive and more honoring to people of color, and it also generates less guilt, fear, and self-deception for white people.

It takes a lot of work for whites to maintain an artificial racial superiority bias. As observed by pastors of color, part of that work is done at a societal level, where barriers are built and maintained against encounter and vulnerability in order to remove the chance for interaction and shared common concerns. The other part of that work is reproduced internally: in white bodies and souls that resist grace, acceptance, and forgiveness, or that underestimate their role and responsibility, accountability and agency in repairing cross-race relationships. This internal work ignores spiritual hunger in favor of control.

Life will eventually confront us with chances to change and unlearn racial bias and transform what has been unjust for so long. When that happens, even if realizations come with pain, the opportunity for white community members is to practice the deeply human skills of communication, feedback, perspective-taking, apology, changing behavior, and asking for help. These are

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skills in which we all require growth. We can continually ask better questions about racism—not to defend, debate or deny whether racism occurred—but to concentrate on where and how racism functions in our midst. The goal becomes to interrupt patterns, repair harm, and reduce future incidents.

CAUTION: When confronted with what has gone wrong, sometimes white adults encounter a sense of rage, along with guilt and pain in ourselves around issues of race. Those of us who are white may feel helpless and angry, or the cost of shame and isolation feels so high that we want to defend ourselves from moral blame. Whenever the emotional temperature rises, we must acknowledge the emotions involved and monitor our behavior, so as to protect the other human beings around us. We might try unwittingly to protect ourselves from unbearable feelings by distancing or punishing any external reminders that seem to threaten our sense of innocence. The danger with that is that a pastor of color can become a target of focus by white congregants, becoming objectified rather than seen as a fully present human being. This targeting/objectification can have lasting impacts on the pastor's physical self, their effectiveness as a leader, and their ministry career.

White Christians learning emotional self-regulation must remind each other that our faith does not rest in any teaching that we are innocent. Jesus teaches instead that we are accountable to foster right relationship with God and our neighbors, and that we always have possibilities in which we can grow.

If guilt and a message of grace are challenging to hear, it becomes worth unpacking how, when, and why our white history and culture have taught us that we are always—and without exception—normal, right, good, and pure.

A future together in a multiracial world depends on clear-sighted, open-hearted humility and practices for mutual learning and unlearning. Toward that future, a pastor of the church does not represent their own forgiveness but God's, and along with it, God's power for transformation.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

discuss

1 Official Christian church teaching on the racial “superiority” of whites drowned out the still small voice of conscience for 500 years, throughout the Age of Exploration and processes of colonization. This moral and spiritual dissonance becomes an inheritance passed down through generations all over the globe. Where do you see impacts in your own family?

2 Talk about your hopes for children of every race, including white children.

assess

This was your next-to-last gathering as part of this ten-part process of discussing aspects of leadership with the pastor of your church. Next month will be the final session. Plan ahead to conclude in a fitting manner. Ponder whether and how to delegate future work to other groups.

next up

- Support and Intervention

CONVERSATION TO support & intervention

Read this chapter in advance, as it will be used as a conversation starter when you gather for your last small group meeting. All quotations come from fifteen clergy who participated in “Pastoral Leadership Across Race: Findings from a Cross-Case Research Study.”

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

read

“

In some cases, white congregations tend to minimize the work of pastors who have a strong accent, who have different customs, [or] simply have a different color of skin.

“

In extreme cases, pastors are paid neither based on their experience nor their education. Sometimes they are treated differently compared to the way white ministers are usually treated.

“

[As a woman] I would see a male pastor come in, and they would completely redecorate the office and buy new office furniture. My experience when I would come in is I would get to make do with what was there.

“

When you go in as an associate, there's already a built-in power dynamic there. We need a special support structure in place to not only provide support, but to have conversations for white male senior pastors, so that their eyes are open to what that power dynamic is and how they can navigate it better.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

reflect

Since you began this dialogue group, you have paid attention to ten themes highlighted by pastors of color in white-founded Christian congregations. Now, you are better able to claim a sacred tradition of leadership through pastors' understandings, abilities, and gifts offered across various settings of the church.

You have newly-expanded language to appreciate the effort and opportunities your pastor is expressing in ministry among you. And you are also able to see some of the dynamics operating in church life that may impact some people more than others. Continued moral support and encouragement is helpful after this group experience has concluded. Any congregation will benefit with further support to grow a shared vocabulary around identity, culture, race, power, the role of the church, and spiritual legacies.

Finally, pastors will need material and financial support to be able to do their work well.

For some churches, one objective in engaging this dialogue series was to prevent unintentional pastoral transition. In actual experiences conveyed by pastors in a cross-case research study on race and leadership, one of the prevalent findings was that financial equity, material resources, and money management in the life of the church proved a significant deterrent to long-term stability in ministry.

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Here are some disparities to pay attention to, especially magnified around gender:

- Full-time / part-time issues and discrepancies
- Benefits including retirement savings and family health insurance
- Vacation, sabbatical, family leave, and continuing education
- Recognition of credentials
- Hours and office space
- Financial resources for ministry in the budget
- Staff support

At times, for a variety of reasons, a pastor might not advocate for themselves if these things have not already been provided. Lay leaders could be best positioned to recognize and advocate for specific changes and sufficient resources.

When a church has challenges of its own with financial wellbeing, it is appropriate to disclose this to a pastor. It is also appropriate to elicit the pastor's assistance with goal-setting and creating a climate of teamwork within the congregation to meet those goals. But it is not appropriate to expect a pastor to subsidize the church budget from their own salary. Some denominations have required salary minimums to guard against this. If not, keep in mind that your present pastor might go along with this, but your future pastor will not thank you.

Lastly, talk with your pastor about their vision and role toward healthy church finances in church life. Some congregations have

the expectation that their spiritual leader will be a lead fundraiser, while others have the opposite expectation. Some churches have painful past experiences with fraud or mismanagement by staff (or volunteers), while others have a wholesome culture of giving with great joy. Administrative aspects of leadership are natural for some pastors, and for others they represent a learning curve. This part of the work does not have to be mysterious but, like other topics too seldom-named, it can bring life and wholeness when discussed openly. God makes a way, providing unending options for faithfulness toward the future that Christ makes possible.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

discuss

1 Review past records. How was your church's former pastor compensated (if not a person of color)? How does this compare to the support package for your current pastor?

2 What infrastructure supported the ministry of your church's former pastor (if male)? What tools, space, and staff resources are needed by your current pastor?

3 If your church has a parsonage/manse/rectory for the pastor to live in, assess the condition and upkeep needed.

assess

This was your final gathering as part of this ten-part process of discussing aspects of church life and leadership with your pastor across race.

As you conclude your group meetings, debrief how this series deepened partnership and collaboration toward God's goals in your midst. What matters linger, unexplored or unfinished? How can your group put in place a plan in order to appropriately address them?

Topics:

- Identity
- Theology (Ecclesiology)
- Cultural Navigation
- Racism
- Talking within the Congregation about Racism
- Preaching
- Exhaustion
- The Call
- Pastoral Care with White People
- Support and Intervention

You have completed a series of ten conversations with your dialogue group and your pastor. This year, you paid attention to findings from a cross-case research study and discussed common themes that pastors of color experience in leadership within white-founded congregations.

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Now is a good time to personally review and reflect on all ten aspects that were identified and explored by your group.

topics

Identity
Theology (Ecclesiology)
Cultural Navigation
Racism
Talking within the Congregation about Racism
Preaching
Exhaustion
The Call
Pastoral Care with White People
Support and Intervention

questions

1 How did this year's small-group dialogue process with your pastor advance relationships beyond assumptions?

2 If faced with surprises or discomfort along the way, to what extent did white folks stay in the process?

3 How much did these conversations expand your convictions, understandings, and imagination for church life and leadership?

4 What church goals surfaced from the conversation, and where will leaders take action?

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closing prayer

Let us pray, dear God.

We pray for leaders of color: for the resources and stamina they need in order to be well and nourished for a long, long time, for their entire families, for joy in place of sighing, and for vision from you to move faith communities ever-deeper into your call for wholeness.

We pray for those in the church who are white: not for hypervigilance, but for humility; not for individual policing, but for collective organizing; not for checking “race” off a list, but for continued vulnerability, learning your ways, and unlearning ways of harm.

We pray that together, we are able to come a little bit more into your reign, to fall in love with the Spirit ever more, to enact what is possible in Jesus’ name, and to dare more, show up fully, and celebrate when others show up fully, as well.

Amen.

amen

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

author's note

You are invited to recommend and share this series with others beyond your church with attribution – Credit @LiftUpValleys on Instagram.

Find Across Race: Leadership Conversations and other resources through the Center for Sustainable Justice. With feedback and questions on this guided experience, please reach the author at: revhimschoot@gmail.com.

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

For Further Study

On race and racism:

- Race: the Power of an Illusion, 2003 video curriculum by California Newsreel and by PBS
- Cracking the Codes, 2014 video curriculum by Shakti Butler
- The Sum of Us, 2021 book by Heather McGhee

On colonial history and the Doctrine of Discovery:

- [1619 Project](#)
- [Upstander Project](#)

Perspectives on pastoral leadership:

- Davis-Lovelace, Bianca. "[The Dance of Inclusion: African American Leadership in Dominant Culture Churches.](#)" Ecclesio.com: The current scene through a Gospel lens Blog, November 1, 2017.
- Hong, Angie. "[Women of Color in Ministry Are Not Scarce, Just Unsupported.](#)" Bearings Online Blog, February 3, 2022.

Practices of repair:

- [Sacred Reckonings](#), 2023 reparations curriculum by Rebecca Voelkel and Jessica Intermill

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

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Colophon & Authors

A NOTE ABOUT ACROSS RACE: LEADERSHIP CONVERSATIONS TYPEFACES AND AUTHORS

ENG	Hello, good morning.
CHN	你好, 早上好。
JPN	こんにちは、おはようございます。
KOR	안녕하세요, 좋은 아침입니다.

The secondary display font is Husar by Jorge Morales. It is "inspired by the rebellion and diplomacy that framed the events in Latin America during the first half of the XIX century, also known as the period of independence."

This body copy, designed by Jinseong Kin, is Min Sans. It is a multilingual typeface that supports Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Latin languages.

The primary display font is Martin. Designed by VOCAL Type Foundry, it is a "non-violent typeface inspired by the remnants of the Memphis Sanitation Strike of 1968."

of all designers
in America are
almost
84%
White



Rev. Dr. Malcolm Himschoot

The Rev. Dr. Malcolm Himschoot is a UCC pastor, teacher, and writer who has served ecumenically in Colorado, Minnesota, Ohio, and Maine. As a white person, he first learned to talk about race from Tené A. Howard at the turn of the century. Interrogating unsaid assumptions about power and difference later helped him make his way as a trans man. Malcolm became known widely in the United Church of Christ for the 2004 documentary *Call Me Malcolm*, and for a 2018 series of short films for pastoral search committees entitled “Stretching Beyond Bias.” An ordained minister, he benefited from seminary education at The Iliff School of Theology and the Methodist Theological School of Ohio. He holds a Doctorate of Ministry in transformational leadership as well as a Master of Divinity, and has practiced community organizing and leadership education in settings within and beyond the church. Malcolm’s collaborative faith-based work toward social change, racial equity and economic justice is featured through Instagram @LiftUpValleys and published in partnership with the Center for Sustainable Justice

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

The Rev. Dr. Renee C. Jackson is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and currently serves as a resource and consultant to Members in Discernment, Committees on Ministry, and UCC Conference Staff regarding the Member in Discernment process and the Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministers of the United Church of Christ. Dr. Jackson earned the Master of Divinity degree from Chicago Theological Seminary and the Doctor of Ministry degree from United Theological Seminary. Dr. Jackson brings her experience as a local church pastor, serving on committees on ministry, and as conference staff, to resource authorized ministers and churches in transition. She believes that leadership conversations across race are valuable for guiding churches and pastors in their commitments to live into the Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-20) as they continue to grow as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.



Rev. Dr. Renee C. Jackson

Across Race: Leadership Conversations

across RACE

Leadership Conversations

by Rev. Dr. Malcolm Himschoot
with Rev. Dr. Renée C. Jackson