

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Religion and Race offers the following guiding principles for those who undertake this study:

- 1. 'Race' is not the problem; racism is.** In recent decades, as people of color have embraced notions of cultural identity and pride and pride in their heritage, some white people have lamented that it is these distinctions that cause harmful division. This is false. Celebrating who we are, as God's creation, is an act of thanks and God created us all in the divine image and celebrated our diversity at Pentecost. Differences are NOT the problem; rather, it is the human sin of using those differences to assign value to one race over others and institutionalizing those values that has given birth to racism.
- 2. Race and racism are real and impact every aspect of society.** While God created all humans in God's divine image, our history as a people is that we have seized upon physical and cultural differences and misused them to divide the human family. The impact has been lasting and systemic: people were enslaved, people were conquered and their land stolen, people were and are murdered, social policies did and do still favor some groups while penalizing others—all based on notions of race.
- 3. Followers of Jesus Christ have a responsibility to resist racism.** Resisting racism gives us the opportunity, not only to follow God's call to work for justice, but also to live into who we proclaim we are. Our identity is wrapped up in God's character of always and eternally standing on the side of those who are oppressed. We resist racism because God created us and called us to tear down all structures and expressions of injustice, and we are those who proclaim to be the earthly hands and feet of the same God.
- 4. We seek to take responsibility, not give in to guilt or shame.** In acknowledging and pledging to battle racism, the goal is to raise awareness and to equip all people—especially white people—to become God's justice workers. There is no escaping our history of institutional racism; however, we have the opportunity to forge a new path with God to claim our moral responsibility to do the right thing.
- 5. Discussing race and racism may feel intimidating, but you CAN do it.** Each one of us has a stake in being part of God's reign on earth and in ensuring that all Christians are reliable, credible witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are at our most reliable and effective as the community of faith as we battle the forces that cause pain, division and death. Racism is one of those forces, but it is difficult for us to discuss. Many white people, in particular, are taught to ignore its reality, while people of color are raised to believe that the fight is theirs alone. We fear one another's anger and pain, we fear our own inadequacies for facing tough topics, and we may believe that racism is just too big, too complicated, and too fraught with emotional landmines. We may not all enter this work from the same place. Still, we believe that people of Christian faith are ready to dismantle racism once and for all, so that our collective work of building God's justice and God's peaceable kin-dom may bear fruit in a world that needs God so much.