

Racial Justice

*“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”
—Galatians 3:28*

While racial discrimination has in theory been outlawed in the United States, in practice racism remains a persistent reality in every level of society. Political, economic and social institutions, the church among them, still discriminate. The damage of centuries of exploitation has not been erased. Indeed, today in the United States, people of color must confront discrimination in housing, pay, education and other areas. People of color also continue to face disproportionate levels of policing and incarceration. Racist policies and practices still determine, to a great extent, how whole communities will advance or be prevented from thriving. Racism has also been at the core of U.S. attitudes toward the rest of the world. While proclaiming democracy and freedom, the U.S. policy has often perpetuated inequality throughout the world as in the case of the United States' role fomenting race-based conflict in Latin American and the Caribbean. Such a system designed to meet the needs of and privilege one group cannot be the means of developing a just society.

The word “race,” along with many of the ideas now associated with the term, was a product of European imperialism and colonization. As Europeans encountered people from different parts of the world, they speculated about the physical, social and cultural differences among various human groups. The rise of the Atlantic slave trade created a further incentive to categorize human groups in order to justify the subordination of Africans. Racism is the systemic oppression of people of color. It occurs at the individual, interpersonal, institutional and structural levels. It may be overt or covert, intentional or unintentional. Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred or discrimination. Racism involves having the power to carry out systemic discriminatory practices through the institutions of our society. Race prejudice plus the misuse of power by systems and institutions equals institutional racism.

The gains of the modern U.S. civil rights movement and those of preceding and subsequent struggles are under threat as institutions of power resist and adapt to long-term structural change that aims to bring equity to all people. Adding to this crisis, the popular media often suggests that the United States is a “post-racial” society; that race, ethnicity and language are no longer important determining factors for survival and prosperity. However, looking at unemployment as an example illuminates the stark reality that race plays in people’s everyday lives. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the Great Recession drove the annual unemployment rate for Latinos to a peak of 12.5 percent in 2010. During the aftermath of the Great Recession, the annual unemployment rate peaked at 15.9 percent for blacks in 2010 and 2011. The highest annual unemployment rate for whites since the onset of the Great Recession was 8.0 percent, still less than the pre-recession annual unemployment rate (8.3 percent) for blacks. Native American unemployment rates vary widely by group and on reservation or off. In the first half of 2013, the American Indian unemployment rate was 11.3 percent. American Indians have endured five years of unemployment rates over 10 percent. Given the structural inequalities that persist, we must continue to strive for racial justice.



United
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Women

FAITH • HOPE • LOVE IN ACTION

Our Vision

The United Methodist Church's Charter for Racial Justice says that "racism is a rejection of the teachings of Jesus Christ" and that "all women and men are made in God's image and all persons are equally valuable in God's sight."

"The United Methodist Church is nothing less than an inclusive church in an inclusive society. Therefore, the UMC calls upon all its people to perform those faithful deeds of love and justice in both church and community that will bring this aim into reality" (Resolution 3371, "A Charter for Racial Justice Policies in an Interdependent Global Community," *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2012*).

What United Methodist Women Members Can Do

Use these resources available from United Methodist Women Mission Resources:

- United Methodist Women Racial Justice Time Line (booklet)
- *Voices of Native American Women* (booklet)
- *Voices of Haitian Women* (booklet)
- *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2012 Reading Program selection)
- Tools for Leaders: Resources for Racial Justice Manual (manual)
www.umwmissionresources.org/pdfs/racialjustice2012.pdf

Get involved in your conference United Methodist Women Racial Justice Charter Committee. Contact your conference president for more information. Organize a spiritual growth retreat or other conference event on current racial justice concerns.

Get involved in the work of United Methodist Women partner organizations working on racial justice:

- Black Alliance for Just Immigration (blackalliance.org) is an education and advocacy group of African Americans and black immigrants from Africa, Latin American and the Caribbean.
- Justice for Our Neighbors (njfon.org), represents the response of the United Methodist Church to the needs of immigrants seeking to reunify their families, secure immigration status, and enjoy the right to work. JFON provides free, professional legal services to immigrants in monthly clinics.
- National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (www.nnirr.org) works to defend and expand the rights of all immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status.
- Sentencing Project (www.sentencingproject.org) works for a fair and effective criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing law and practice and alternatives to incarceration.

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