



Do Segregated Churches Imply Racism?

| *Is there such a thing as integrated worship?*

Goal for the Session

Participants will discover the origins of racial ideology and its role in the establishment of racially segregated churches. Using this knowledge, participants will consider if segregated worship or fully integrated worship is the call for the body of Christ.

Preparing for the Session

- This study is part of the Racism Study Pack. Your group may use this study alone, although we suggest you use it along with the other studies in the pack.
- Following is the suggested order of the study pack, although you may study it in any order your group chooses.
 - Why Is it So Difficult to Talk About Racism?
 - Racism 101
 - The Bible and Racism
 - A History of Racism in the United States
 - White Privilege
 - Is Affirmative Action Still Needed?
 - Do Segregated Churches Imply Racism?
- Pray for yourself and the participants.
- E-mail copies of the Participant Handout that came with this study to the participants and make extra copies for the session.

Session at a Glance

OPENING

- Initial offering
- Prayer

ENGAGING

- Identifying misconceptions
- Pros and cons

RESPONDING

- Considering Scripture
- Developing a worship service

CLOSING

- Sing or pray

- Read over this Leader's Guide and select activities that will fit into your time frame. Be prepared with alternatives depending on the direction of the discussion.
- Prepare newsprints with statements for the session.

Materials Needed

- Newsprint, whiteboard, or chalkboard
- Markers
- Bibles

Teaching Tip

Dialogue dealing with issues of race will often generate heated, defensive responses. In an effort to minimize such responses, preface the session by stating that this is a time of discovery and questioning. Encourage everyone to be gracious listeners. Convey to the participants that this is not the time to make permanent changes in a worship service. It may be the impetus for such changes in the future, but most importantly the goal of this session is to create a safe space for dialogue.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Initial Offering

Write the following statement on a sheet of newsprint, whiteboard, or chalkboard:

I attend a particular worship service because of the _____.

As participants come in, invite them to reflect upon the statement and write down a couple of one-word responses. There will invariably be responses that point directly or indirectly to the importance of comfort. Participants may volunteer words such as music, friendliness, welcome, warmth, or fellowship, but all have to do with comfort. Share this insight with the participants.

2. Prayer

You may pray the following prayer or use one of your own choosing.

God of creation, you who made all in the goodness of your image, help us to acknowledge those in the local and global body who are suffering and hurting. May your desire for fullness for all take root in us and move us to take action. Give us strength to share our stories and respond with compassion. May your Spirit guide us to a new community of mutual appreciation and celebration of your creative hand. **Amen.**

Exploring (25 minutes)

3. Identifying Misconceptions

On another piece of newsprint, or whiteboard, or chalkboard, write the following two statements:

1. All Korean worship services are the same.
True_____ False_____

2. For any act to be racist, it has to be intentional.

True_____ False_____

Invite participants to pair up and discuss these two statements. After a few minutes discuss the statements as a whole group. Write some of their justifications—both true or false—under each statement. Go over the answers below.

1. *False.* Monoculture and/or ethnically specific worship services range from traditional to contemporary. The main draw of these churches is the comfort provided in forming community with those who can empathize with each other.
2. *False.* Racism occurs even if those who benefit have no intention of hurting others. This is especially the case with “covert” or “unconscious” racism, where the system in place operates to the distinct though unacknowledged advantage of well-intentioned people of European descent.

Direct the participants to the second paragraph under “Origin of Racial Ideology” in the Participant Handout. Point to Thomas Jefferson’s description of the inferiority of African Americans based upon their skin color and how the ideology of race led to segregated worship. African Americans did not feel comfort in the worship space.

4. Pros and Cons

Divide the participants into two groups. Ask each group to select a scribe and a spokesperson. Using their Participant Handout, one group will discuss and create a pro and con list for segregated worship and the second group will do likewise for truly integrated worship. Give each group a sheet of newsprint and markers. Have each group present their list. Allow enough time for questions and discussion.

Responding (10 minutes)

5. Considering Scripture

Invite the participants to read Jeremiah 7:3–7 and Galatians 3:26–28. Ask the following questions:

- As the body of Christ, is there a place for segregated worship?
- According to the summary portion of the Participant Handout, what is necessary for an integrated worship to come to fruition?

6. Developing a Worship Service

If the discussion generated from this session leads to a desire to seek a truly integrated worship service, ask participants to come up with some possibilities for their congregation. Perhaps your congregation already has elements of integrated worship. Allow a general discussion to flow. How has it worked? What could make it better?

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Sing or Pray

Sing “Jesus Loves the Little Children,” or pray the following prayer or one of your own choosing.

Loving God, we thank you for your words that teach and heal. Help us to remember our place in your created order and that we are not greater or less than others. Help us to remember you in our interactions. **Amen.**

Teaching Alternatives

- Have an in-depth Bible study utilizing the following passages: Jeremiah 7:5–6; Ezekiel 36:22–28; Matthew 7:1–5; and 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. Ask the group: Do these passages guide us in our questions of segregated or integrated worship? If so, how?
- Do a case study of Church of All Nations and Plymouth United Church of Christ discussed in the Participant Handout. Discuss the following questions:
 - What practices did each church incorporate to be integrated?
 - Is this realistic for all churches?

- Read and discuss LeAna Gloor’s article “From the Melting Pot to the Tossed Salad Metaphor: Why Coerc” (see “For More Information” below).

About the Writer

Michelle Hwang is the director of Christian education at Second Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, Maryland.

For More Information

LeAna B. Gloor, “From the Melting Pot to the Tossed Salad Metaphor: Why Coerc,” *Hohonu*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2006, <http://www.uhh.hawaii.edu/academics/hohonu/writing.php?id=91>.

James Henretta, “Richard Allen and African-American Identity,” in *America’s History* (New York: Worth Publishers, 1997), chapter accessed at <http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/spring97/allen.html>.

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* [microform] (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1853) <http://books.google.com/books?id=DTWttRSMtbYC&printsec=titlepage> Jefferson.

Martin Luther King Jr., “Dr. Martin Luther King’s 1963 WMU Speech,” Western Michigan Archives, <http://www.wmich.edu/library/archives/mlk/q-a.html>.

Cheryl Jeanne Sanders, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Audrey Smedley and Brian D. Smedley, “Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem Is Real,” *American Psychologist* 60, no. 1 (2005): 16–26.

Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 3rd ed., rev. and enl. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

Charles Reagan Wilson, “Overview: Religion and the U.S. American South,” *Southern Spaces*, June 14, 2005, <http://www.southernspaces.org/contents/2004/wilson/trackrev.1c.v2.htm>.

Additional Teaching Tips for Various Types of Groups

Leading a session on racism is ideally accomplished with a diverse group of participants representing a variety of heritages. But unfortunately this is not always possible or realistic. Given these circumstances we have provided tips for facilitating these sessions in a fruitful manner.

General Guidelines

- Remind participants that these sessions are a starting point. The work to challenge racism is ongoing. Remind yourself that conversations dealing with racism are difficult and uncomfortable. This is normal.
- All voices need to be heard and respected. Be mindful that no one is targeted for their views. Encourage everyone to listen to each other and the writers of the sessions without being defensive.
- Be mindful that the conversation stays on topic with time to share experience, analysis, and hopes for the future.
- Identify your own struggles with race and racism in order to check any negative assumptions or stereotypes you may have.

All-White Congregations

- Be alert that the conversation stays on topic and does not downplay the effect of racism.
- An all-white conversation may provide a forum for an honest expression of views. Issues of white guilt and denial are normal if the discussion is fruitful. Address these issues and avoid the tendency to downplay or ignore them.
- Racism cannot be and is not an issue only for people of color. Encourage participants to take ownership.

Primarily White Group with a Few People of Color

- Be alert to statements or questions that ask the person of color to make a sweeping generalization for all people of color. For example: What do people of color need or want?
- Racism must be challenged together by people of color and white people. Watch for manifestations of white guilt in the form of denial.
- If possible, have two facilitators, one white and one person of color.
- This group makeup can be tricky because the power dynamic so closely mirrors what people of color experience in many aspects of their lives. Be mindful that the people of color in the room don't feel pressured to "educate" the white participants about race or racism. Also, make sure that the experiences of the people of color don't get sidetracked, downplayed, or explained away even if there is disagreement in the room.

Primarily People of Color with a Few White People

- The white participants may feel unable to express themselves openly, resulting in a lack of honesty. Be careful to keep the conversation from becoming accusatory.
- If possible, have two facilitators, one white and one person of color.

Group with All People of Color

- Facilitator must be a person of color for honest exchange.
- Not all people of color will agree about what the definitions or implications of racism are in society or in their lives, so don't assume opinions or feel the need to force consensus. Instead, call participants to a spirit of support amid different experiences, creative collaboration, and coalition building.