Continuing the Conversation: Tools to Engage your Parish

During the 2016 Convention presentation by the **Racial Justice and Reconciliation Commission** of the Diocese of Long Island, you watched Bishop Lawrence Provenzano in the video produced by news anchor, host, and author, Julian Phillips and you watched the ChurchNext Video clip of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry in which he says, “racial justice will not change if we ignore it. We must confront it when we find it and one way to confront it is to have conversations about subjects that we would rather not engage.”

In order to help you build upon the racial justice conversation started at convention, additional resources have been assembled in the pages that follow. It is our hope that these materials may be used as helpful tools of engagement in your parish as you face questions of race and equality together. Hosting small group meetings, organizing community learning events or creating a book study group on this issue can be a positive step towards genuine understanding and towards the creation of a society in which every person is treated with dignity, seen as an equal and given the same opportunity to succeed.

There is already much happening within this diverse diocese to help eradicate individual and structural racism. We encourage you to continue to do what you are already doing by preaching, teaching and engaging with others. The Commission on Racial Justice and Reconciliation has been formed to support your efforts and to encourage an ongoing commitment to eradicating racism and injustice in our neighborhoods across Long Island and beyond. Our convention conversations and your voice and participation will strengthen and move the work of the commission. The process of developing our communal response to the realities of racism will develop overtime as we continue this journey in the months and years to come.

**Covenanting Principles of the Commission**

*The commission acknowledges that racism is a system of domination and believes that justice and reconciliation can be achieved through Conversation and Prayer, Education, Engagement and Action.*

*This commission is focused on eradicating racism in its many forms within institutions, communities and in individuals through supportive interactions and transformative programs that can be implemented throughout the diocese and specifically through local congregations.*

*The commission’s recommendations will be shaped and informed by the work and voices of clergy, lay leaders and parishioners within the diocese, by other ecumenical and interfaith partners, and by experts and leaders in the educational, political and social service sectors.*

*With the wholehearted support and encouragement of the Bishop, and with input from all members of the Diocese of Long Island, the commission will strive to influence and propel public and personal actions that help identify and eradicate the root causes of structural racism and to foster supportive relationships, conditions and programs that bring about justice and repair.*
Online Video Resources

Recommended for parish forums, coffee hour conversations, continuing education and jump-starting parish-based committees on racial justice and reconciliation.

Link to Bishop Provenzano’s video:
https://vimeo.com/diocesealongisland/BishopReflectionRacialJustice

Spirituality & Racial Justice with Michael Curry

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6V-EzW7HoRo

This video clip is an introduction to the 4-part educational series from the ChurchNext TV series titled Spirituality and Racial Justice hosted by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. During this talk, Bishop Curry helps us understand how the path towards a fairer and just world starts with the willingness to have “sacred conversations” about subjects and issues that we would otherwise rather not engage about. During this introductory clip, Bishop Curry talks about confronting the “demon” of racial injustice and inequality that is prevalent in our world today and reminds us that although the early civil rights movement focused on African Americans, over time, people began to understand how Native Americans, Latino Americans, women, gay people and other groups also struggle for equality.

Facing the Truth: The Case for Reparations with Ta-Nehisi Coates

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pm9DJuTrO8Q

Bill Moyers and Ta-Nehisi Coates, author of Between the World and Me, talk about Coates’ June 2014 cover story for the Atlantic magazine, titled “The Case for Reparations.” In it, Coates argues that we have to dig deeper into our past and the original sin of slavery, in order to confront the institutional racism that continues to pervade society. During the interview, Coates points to a century of racist and exploitive housing policies that made it hard for African-Americans to own homes and forced them to live in poorer neighborhoods with unequal access to a good education, resulting in a major wealth gap between black and white. From the lynching tree to today’s mass incarceration of young African-Americans, he says we need to examine our motives more intently and reconcile the moral debt and economic damage inflicted upon generations of black Americans.

Trinity Institute: Soul Searching in a Culture of Control with Kelly Brown Douglas

https://www.trinitywallstreet.org/trinity-institute/2016/schedule

From within Christianity, Episcopal theologian and author Kelly Brown Douglas has written extensively about sex, slavery and the black body. After the Trayvon Martin killing, Brown Douglas channeled her grief into a book, Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God. During this speech, given at the Trinity Institute 2016 conference for racial justice, Brown Douglas talks about the ancient concept of “chattel”, how it came to be, and how it underlies the conflicts and killings occurring in our modern world. She discusses the origins of the Anglo-Saxon view of superiority and how it is inherently discriminatory and how systems of injustice – racism, sexism, heterosexism, manifest themselves as a result of this ancient belief.
Trinity Institute: Soul Searching in a Culture of Control with Victor Rios

https://www.trinitywallstreet.org/trinity-institute/2016/schedule

Victor Rios, PhD, is a former gang member who went on to earn a PhD at Berkeley. He is the author of *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, among other notable books. During this talk given at the Trinity Institute 2016 Conference for Racial Justice, Victor discusses how juvenile crime policies and criminalization affect the everyday lives of urban youth. He discusses how educational equality, restorative justice, resilience, motivation, and youth culture are critically important in order for us to address racial injustice and inequality. Rios discusses practical pathways and offers ideas and insights based on his personal life experiences.

Sunday Sermon at Washington National Cathedral with Bryan Stevenson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoN3g-HdEUw

For over 30 years, Bryan Stevenson has dedicated his life to help release those wrongly condemned to death row. He has successfully advocated to eliminate the prosecution of children as adults and he is leading the charge for a renewed conversation about racism in the U.S. by connecting contemporary injustices with slavery, lynching and segregation. Drawing from the tenets of his own Christian faith, Bryan preaches from the pulpit and asks how faithful members of a church can engage and connect with the issue of injustice and discrimination. He offers tangible, theologically-based inspiration into the ways we can each become better ambassadors and deepen our resolve to pursue justice, mercy and reconciliation.

TED Talk: We Need to Talk About an Injustice with Bryan Stevenson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2tOp7OxyQ8

During this now famous TED Talk, Bryan Stevenson shares some hard truths about America's justice system, starting with the massive imbalance along racial lines: a third of the country's black male population has been incarcerated at some point in their lives. This reality, which he says is wrapped up in America's unexamined history, is rarely talked about with this level of candor, insight and persuasiveness. Listen as Stevenson shares why he believes that “we have a system of justice in this country that treats you much better if you’re rich and guilty than if you are poor and innocent.”
Questions to Facilitate Conversation

*Please consider using questions such as these to prompt discussion & generate meaningful conversation.*

**Questions that surface personal experiences and reflection;**

- How has racism affected your life?
- Listening to the speaker made me feel:
- Listening to the speaker made me question:
- What do I (we) need to learn more about?
- What is my view and understanding of the word “justice”?

**Questions that help uncover challenges and opportunities;**

- What challenges and opportunities are we facing? What is at stake here?
- What is one issue in my community that needs to be addressed?
- What relationships can we leverage to be influential in this effort?

**Questions that explore possibilities and steps forward;**

- What is the need our parish can uniquely meet?
- Where do you see yourself and this congregation on this issue?
- What is the next level of engagement for this work as a parish? Where should we be heading?

**Questions that consider historical and institutional influences;**

- How is racism evident in our community today?
- What in our faith journey asks that we respond to the injustices in our world?
- How has the church perpetuated systems of racism?
- How can we influence or support the work of the Commission on Racial Justice & Reconciliation?
**Book Club Resources**

Consider starting a book study group to foster conversation, connections and deeper learning and exploration. All books noted here have companion study guides easily available using an online search.

*The Help* is about a twenty-two-year-old woman named Skeeter who has just returned home after graduating from Ole Miss. The book is set in 1962, Mississippi, and Skeeter’s mother will not be happy until Skeeter has a ring on her finger. Skeeter would normally turn to her beloved maid Constantine, the woman who raised her, but Constantine has disappeared and no one will tell Skeeter where she has gone. The search for her leads Skeeter to uncover discrimination between races. She teams up with the housekeepers and maids to tell the story to the public. They find that they have more in common than they think and that everyone needs a champion.

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of Walter McMillian, a young man who was sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn’t commit. The case drew Bryan into a tangle of conspiracy, political machination, and legal brinksmanship—and transformed his understanding of mercy and justice forever. *Just Mercy* is at once an unforgettable account of an idealistic, gifted young lawyer’s coming of age, a moving window into the lives of those he has defended, and an inspiring argument for compassion in the pursuit of true justice.

Once in a great while a book comes along that changes the way we see the world and helps to fuel a nationwide social movement. *The New Jim Crow* is such a book. Praised by Harvard Law professor Lani Guinier as "brave and bold," this book directly challenges the notion that the election of Barack Obama signals a new era of colorblindness. With dazzling candor, legal scholar Michelle Alexander argues that "we have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it." By targeting black men through the War on Drugs and decimating communities of color, the U.S. criminal justice system functions as a contemporary system of racial control—relegating millions to a permanent second-class status—even as it formally adheres to the principle of colorblindness.
Terms and Definitions

Individual-Level Racism

Internalized Racism:

1. Lies within individuals
2. Private beliefs and biases about race and racism, influenced by our culture
3. Example: A belief that you or others are more or less intelligent, or beautiful, because of your race

Interpersonal Racism:

1. Occurs between individuals
2. Biases that occur when individuals interact with others and their private racial beliefs affect their public interactions
3. Examples: Racial slurs, bigotry, hate crimes, and racial violence

Systemic-Level Racism

Institutional Racism:

1. Occurs within institutions and systems of power
2. Unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions (schools, workplaces, etc.) that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for white people
3. Example: A school system that concentrates people of color in the most overcrowded schools, the least-challenging classes, and the least-qualified teachers, resulting in higher drop-out rates and disciplinary rates compared with those of white students.

Interpersonal Racism:

1. Racial bias among institutions and across society
2. Cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal factors including the history, culture, ideology, and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color
3. Example: The overwhelming number of depictions of people of color as criminals in mainstream media, which can influence how various institutions and individuals treat people of color with suspicion when they are shopping, traveling, or seeking housing and employment – all of which can result in discriminatory treatment and unequal outcomes.

Credit: RACE FORWARD, The Center for Racial Justice Innovation, January 2014