

Facilitator Notes for White Privilege

Before the meeting

This session has a Sharing Activity after the Shared Readings – “The Walk.” You should familiarize yourself with how “The Walk” works so that you can lead it at the meeting. On an internet search, type in “What is Privilege? YouTube” for directions on The Walk. (*If you have trouble figuring out how to do all this, contact the Covenant Group Steering Committee or other facilitators*). When you understand how “The Walk” works, think about the room your group meets in and try to visualize the activity. You may want to go into the hallway if you are in the Family Room, or arrive a little early to move some furniture around to accommodate this activity. When you do “The Walk,” you may not want to use the handholding.

Gathering

Words of the Day

I experience white privilege when I ...

Chalice Lighting

We light this chalice to shine on our time together. In its light we celebrate the relationships and understanding we are creating in this place and time. May our sharing be deep. (Light chalice)

The Basket

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support

Shared Readings

For some white people, the words “white privilege” elicit an uneasy feeling because, for them, the term is accusatory without being specific. White privilege *does not* mean that any white person who achieved anything didn’t work hard for it. It is an irrefutable, concrete phenomenon that manifests itself in real, measurable values, and we should use it as such. *Michael Harriot*

[White privilege] I think is a word that we have created to make white people comfortable – while we talk about racism, and white supremacy, which is much more uncomfortable for folks because it names things and it’s very, very direct. *Ta-Nehisi Coates*

White people’s lack of consciousness about their racial identities has grave consequences in that it not only denies white people the experience of seeing themselves as benefiting from racism, but in doing so, frees them from taking responsibility for eradicating it. *Alice McIntyre*

There is a strange kind of enigma associated with the problem of racism. No one, or almost no one, wishes to see themselves as racist; still, racism persists, real and tenacious. *Albert Memmi, Racism*

A part of us likes having white power and privilege ... Consciously or unconsciously we accept this special treatment. I know there is a part of me that does. There is a part of us that loves our white power and privilege. Otherwise there would be a lot more effort to end it. *Tim Wise*

In short, white people can continue to use unearned privilege to remain ignorant, or we can determine to put aside our opacities in order to see clearly and live differently. *Frances E. Kendall*

But we who are white don't have to think about being white. By not thinking about it, we also do not have to think about the issue of racism and the benefits it gives to us as white people. Racism is designed to work without our thinking about it. *Joseph R. Barndt*

We have only begun to know
the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of the struggle.
Denise Levertov

What I ask my white students to do, and what I ask of you, my dear friends, is to try, the best you can, to surrender your innocence, to reject the willful denial of history, and to live fully in our complicated present with all of the discomfort it brings. *Michael Eric Dyson*

The Sharing Activity, "The Walk," is on the next page.

Sharing Activity

The Walk. Line up side by side in a space large enough for each person to take eight or ten steps forwards or backwards. The group leader will read the following statements one by one. At each statement, group members will step forward, stand still, or step backward according to how the statement applies to them.

1. If you have been discriminated against, or verbally or physically abused because of your appearance, take a step back.
2. If the primary language spoken in your household is not English, take one step back.
3. If you have ever tried to change your speech or mannerisms to gain acceptance, take one step back.
4. If you ever felt embarrassed about your clothes or house while growing up, take one step back.
5. If people have blamed your mistakes on your gender/ethnicity, take one step back.
6. If you are reasonably sure you would be hired for a job based on your ability and qualifications, take one step forward.
7. If you had a job during your high school or college years, take one step back.
8. If you have ever felt like there was not an adequate or accurate representation of a group you identify with in the media, take one step back.
9. If you were ever offered a job because of your association with a friend or family member, take one step forward.
10. If you can go anywhere in the country, and easily find the kinds of hair products you need and/or cosmetics that match your skin color, take one step forward.
11. If there were more than 50 books in your house growing up, take one step forward.
12. If you would never think twice about calling the police when trouble occurs, take one step forward.
13. If anyone has told you that you shouldn't pursue higher education, take one step back.
14. If you get time off for your religious holidays, take one step forward.
15. If your city's government and police look like you, take one step forward.

Look around at where you are.

Then re-form the circle to continue with the covenant group session.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round 1: Share your reflections on white privilege and the preparation materials.

Round 2: Share additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Circle

Extinguishing the Chalice

We extinguish this flame and we remember the warmth of our community, the light of our wisdom, the generosity of our sharing. We keep these in our heart until we meet again.

(Extinguish the chalice.)

Song/Chime

Announcements

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the facilitator know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the facilitator the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, giving advice, or advocating a specific view
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn and to stay on the “I-message.”

Preparation for White Privilege

In this country, we swim in a sea of white privilege. If we're white, we're like fish in water; we don't even notice it. If we're not white, then we're like cats in water; it's very uncomfortable, at best, and potentially fatal, at worst.

I grew up in the South, in the 1950s, where white supremacy had been made the law of the land. My family were modest, working-class whites who lived in small houses, drove older cars, and took for granted that people with dark skin were inferior. My grandmother's little house was always immaculately maintained, thanks in part to an African-American yard man. She didn't earn much money, but he earned little enough that she could afford his services.

When I was 3 or 4 years old, I learned a powerful word listening to my parents talk: *nigger*. I didn't know exactly what it meant, but I know who it applied to, so one Saturday I decided to try it out. I climbed up the porch railing and called out softly "Hey, nigger." The man flinched, looked down at his lawnmower and tried to pretend he hadn't heard me. So I called out louder "Hey, nigger!" This time, he looked up and simply said "Don't say that word, boy." The expression on his face told me all I needed to know about that word: it meant that even a 4-year-old white child had the power to injure a grown man with impunity, if the child was white and the man was dark.

I still remember this incident, decades later, because I immediately felt guilty for what I had just done. My parents might be racist, but I still had a child's sense of compassion and justice. I knew that this was not just. So, years later, when I was confronted with the term "white supremacy" as an adult, I bristled. I was no white supremacist – hadn't I felt the yard man's pain, and hadn't I repented of my cruelty? Didn't I still feel the guilt over it?

But that's not the way white supremacy works. Richard Rohr, Franciscan priest says white privilege is largely hidden from our eyes if we are white. "Why? Because it is structural instead of psychological, and we tend to interpret most things in personal, individual, and psychological ways. Since we do not consciously have racist attitudes or overt racist behavior we kindly judge ourselves to be open minded, egalitarian, 'liberal,' and therefore surely not racist."

The idea of "white privilege" has been around for a long time. In the civil rights era, the term "white-skin privilege" was used. Later, many commentators discussed "institutional racism," the racist structures built into housing, education, and employment. Contemporary use of the term "white privilege" looks back to a 1988 article by Peggy McIntosh: "White privilege is like an invisible weightless backpack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks." She listed forty-six examples of white privilege. Here are a few, adapted:

- I can choose makeup or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
- I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.
- If a traffic cop pulls me over ... I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
- I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group where I am the only member of my race.

White privilege can be measured in economic terms. Columnist Michael Harriot measures education, employment, income, and spending. "If education is the key to success, then there is no debate that whites have the advantage in America." Black unemployment is significantly higher

than white unemployment, with black men paid almost 25% less than white men with the same years of work experience. Costs of groceries, mortgage rates and car insurance are all higher in poor black neighborhoods than in white neighborhoods of the same average income.

The first steps in dismantling structural white privilege are to identify it, understand how it affects us, and then stand against it wherever it occurs. But it all starts with acknowledging that it exists.

White privilege refers to the collection of benefits that white people receive in a racially structured society in which they are at the top of the racial hierarchy. *Nicki Lisa Cole*

Given America's history, why should anyone be surprised to find white privilege so woven into the unexamined institutional practices, habits of mind, and received truths that [white] Americans can barely see it? *Michael K. Brown*

Privilege is the flipside of discrimination. If people of color face discrimination in housing, employment and elsewhere, then the rest of us are receiving a de facto subsidy, a privilege, an advantage in those realms of daily life. There can be no down without an up *Tim Wise*

The most radical action a white person can take is to acknowledge this denied privilege, to say, "Yes, you're right. In our institutional structures, and in deep psychological structures, our underlying assumption is that our lives are worth more than yours."

Michael Eric Dyson, Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America

White people and Black people are not having a discussion about race. Black people, thinking as a group, are talking about living in a racist system. White people, thinking as individuals, refuse to talk about "I, racist" and instead protect their own individual and personal goodness. In doing so, they reject the existence of racism. *John Metta*

Questions to Ponder

1. Watch a video about white privilege online. Search for "White Privilege Explained in Five Minutes" or paste this address into your browser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=na14F8dVTSw>. For another video, search for "Students learn a powerful lesson privilege" or paste this address into your browser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KlvmuxzYE>.
2. When did you first realize your race? Tell about how this happened.
3. When did you first understand the concept of unearned privilege? What were/are some of your feelings as at this time?
4. Define white privilege as you experience and understand it.
5. How can we all work to dismantle the invisible benefits of institutional racism?

Words of the Day

Before coming to the gathering, think of a few words, phrases, or metaphors that describe ways you understand and experience white privilege. The prompt for the Words of the Day activity will be to complete this sentence: "I experience white privilege when I ..."

Gathering for White Privilege

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Sharing Activity

The Walk. The facilitator will guide everyone in an activity about privilege.

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