



# Southwest Conference

United Church of Christ

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Dear Beloved Siblings in the Southwest Conference:

The Southwest Conference Racial Justice Team invites you on a journey toward becoming a Racial Justice ministry setting. This work is an unfolding movement of Spirit requiring much imagination and determination. We hope that you'll feel a call to this journey.

Before you begin, know this: The journey is not a comfortable one. For many of us, the experience has included deep inner work, including grief over our personal and cultural history, anger regarding the lacks in our education and formation, and immense sorrow over the way white supremacy and related ideologies have shaped our thinking and our actions. If your ministry setting chooses to move forward with work and study, the prayers of the Racial Justice Team are with you.

We are confident that future gatherings of the Southwest Conference will include celebrations and sharing of racial justice covenants from a variety of congregations and communities. Even then, we know the work will have just begun.

Please email at [racialjusticeteam@uccswc.org](mailto:racialjusticeteam@uccswc.org) if we can be of assistance, if you are looking for conversation partners in this work, and to update us about your journey.

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In faith and courage,

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Your SWC Racial Justice Team

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## 9 Steps to Becoming a Racial Justice Church

Called and calling our churches and other ministry settings to decenter whiteness and commit to Racial Justice, the Racial Justice Team of the Southwest Conference offers this pathway to becoming a Racial Justice Church or Ministry Setting.

### Step 1 – CREATE SPACE FOR THE RACIAL JUSTICE PROCESS

Create space within your congregation’s structure for a discernment process on becoming a Racial Justice Church. The Pastor and a designated ministry team need to work together. Effective communication is the first step in becoming a Racial Justice Church. This work touches sensitive parts of who we are individually and corporately. Be prepared for strong emotions. Be prepared to handle conflict in healthy ways. Not everyone is ready to do this work, and sometimes people leave the work or the church. It must be done in a space of love and commitment to making God’s “beloved community” real on Earth for all people.

### Step 2 – FORM A RACIAL JUSTICE TEAM TO STEER THE PROCESS

The Racial Justice Team needs to include diverse members who can commit themselves to six months to two years of work guiding a process of discernment and decision making about racial justice locally, regionally, and globally. Hispanic, Black, Indigenous, Asian and Pacific Islander, and other People of Color are important collaborators in the quest for racial justice; however, it is not the sole responsibility of victims of racial injustice to educate people about racial justice.

### Step 3 – EXAMINE WHERE YOU ARE AND WHERE YOU WANT TO GO

Using resources developed by a broad range of disciplines, and listening to diverse cultural voices, the Team will educate themselves and their congregation, guiding a process of study and discernment about the history, continuing state, experiences of racism, whiteness and how to decenter it, privilege, interlocking systems of oppression, systemic racism, and what it means to be a Racial Justice Ministry Setting.

Tools for this journey can include books, book studies, speaker forums, movies and media presentations, sermons, testimonies, and the list goes on. The Southwest Conference index of resources is available at [\[link coming soon\]](#). As our conference is blessed with peoples of many different identities, you should place special emphasis on listening to the voices and experiences of the peoples present in your area. Reach out to congregations and organizations of color to learn local history, about racial barriers they have encountered, and to discover how you can be a good ally.

Because racism intersects many other matters of injustice, collaborate with your congregation’s LGBT, gender equality, immigration, accessibility, mental health, civil rights, and other justice groups to explore ways you can coordinate your work.

This step in the process will take a considerable length of time – months to years – and needs to include a variety of resources from various sections of the index. Be in touch with the Conference Racial Justice Team so that they can offer support on your journey.



## Step 4 – GROUND YOUR PROCESS IN BIBLICAL TEXT

Throughout our Sacred Texts, there are numerous verses that can guide our work. Here are but a few. Use the Bible as a powerful tool to guide your understanding of God’s plan for the equality and dignity of all God’s people, and for how we are called to make that plan a reality in our ministry settings and in our community.

For example, the following texts show our fundamental equality in the eyes of God.

- *“Let us make humankind in our image, to be like us... Humankind was created as God’s reflection: in the divine image God created them; differently gendered, God made them,”* and there is nothing in our foundational understanding of humanity created by God that excludes any human being from reflecting the image of God, and there is no reference to skin color. (Genesis 1:26, 27)
- *“All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.”* (Galatians 3:27-28)
- *“If you say you love God but hate your sibling, you are a liar. For you cannot love God, whom you have not seen, if you hate your neighbor, whom you have seen.”* (1 John 4:20)

Key bible stories celebrate the liberation of enslaved peoples.

- The experience of liberation from racial slavery is one of the central themes of the entire Hebrew Scriptures. Celebrating the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt is at the heart of what it means to be the people of God. (Exodus 1-14)

The bible frequently admonishes us to treat strangers and foreigners with kindness and warns us against oppression:

- *“If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, 7 then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever.”* (Jeremiah 7:5-6)

The bible also tells us very clearly that God’s church is meant for all God’s people:

- *“...these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”* (Isaiah 56:7)

## Step 5 – WRITE A RACIAL JUSTICE COVENANT

Your church’s Racial Justice Team will write a Racial Justice Covenant to be presented to the church governing body and congregation. This covenant may later be shared publicly in your community and put on your church website. Resources to help you draft a racial justice covenant may be found on the [\[link coming soon\]](#) People in your community may not use the same language to refer to their identities and there is no universally accepted language for this. It is therefore best to consult individuals about their preferred terms for their individual identities, but in a document, it may be necessary to select a term that is used by the majority of people in your community, realizing that it may change over time and may not be universally accepted.



## STEP 6 – DECIDE AT A CONGREGATIONAL MEETING TO BECOME A RACIAL JUSTICE CHURCH

At a meeting, present your process, the text of your Racial Justice Covenant, and your revised Mission Statement (if applicable). One option for this decision is a congregational vote. A preferred option might be consensus building. This is an important decision that requires care. Voting creates winners and losers, while consensus includes everyone's voices and invites full participation in the community's decision. Consensus creates an important beginning for the healing process you are seeking to create in your community. Resources for using consensus building are available through the Conference. [link] If your church by-laws require congregational voting, the SWC Racial Justice Team recommends voting after consensus is achieved.

## STEP 7 – DETERMINE WHAT BODY WILL OVERSEE THE RACIAL JUSTICE WORK OF YOUR CHURCH

The work of Racial Justice is an ongoing process. Determine what team in your church will ensure what your process and covenant will continue and be lived out.

## STEP 8 – CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH A PUBLIC DECLARATION

Sharing your decision and your covenant publicly invites your church to live up to the commitments and promises you made in your covenant. Sharing happens through signs, marketing, social media, and/or press releases. Regularly mention your covenant in worship services and other gatherings inside and outside of your faith community. Be sure to share your declaration and covenant with the Southwest Conference Racial Justice Team.

## STEP 9 – GO FORTH AND ACT ON BEHALF OF RACIAL JUSTICE

Go forth and act on behalf of racial justice knowing God's wisdom and power go with you! Build relationships with other churches, organizations, and communities for doing this work. Revisit your Racial Justice Covenant regularly. Measure all of your church's decisions and practices by your Racial Justice Covenant.

