

Speaking Out Against RACISM AND HATE IN CANADA



The Presbyterian Church in Canada



Justice opposes prejudice in every form.
It rejects discrimination on such grounds as race, sex, age, status or handicap.
Justice stands with our neighbours in the struggle for dignity and respect
And demands the exercise of power for good.

Living Faith, 8.4.6

Introduction

This brief study is adapted from the 2020 interim report of Justice Ministries to the General Assembly, which had a section on racism and hate. A more full and involved resource addressing racism and xenophobia is already underway and will be released later this year, but in light of the protests following police killing George Floyd in the United States and the demonstrations and protests concerning systemic racism in places across Canada, we want to give people a guide and conversation starter to enable churches and groups to have discussions and pursue responses to systemic racism and hate.

As early as 1972 The Presbyterian Church in Canada stated, “Racism practiced by the white-skinned against their darker-skinned brothers is one of the world’s basic problems, and a blatant denial of the Christian faith.” (A&P 1972, pp. 269–270, 59) This statement was made in the context of Apartheid, but the sentiment that racism is “a blatant denial of the Christian faith” remains. There is no place in Christian belief, practice or identity for white supremacy—or any kind of racism.

The church has struggled over the years to live out this stance, but it remains the call and duty of all Christians to work for a world in which all humans, regardless of the colour of their skin or any differentiating characteristics, are respected and loved as image-bearers of God. This study resource is intended as a conversation starter (or continuer) for people and congregations to dig more deeply into responding to racism and systemic racial injustice.

The conversations around these issues are very difficult. There has been a great deal of pain and trauma, even loss of life, stemming from racism. We ask, as you engage in this study, that you treat everyone respectfully. We may not always understand or agree with each other, but only through listening to each other and learning from people with lived experience of racism—those for whom the stakes are higher—can we truly begin to confront and change unjust social structures, practices, and relationships.

Let us begin with prayer.

God who loves all the world, we ask that you be with us today. Help us listen, help us learn, help us change what needs changing. We come before you seeking strength to end something so pervasive, so harmful, it can seem impossible. But we know that with you all things are possible. Guide us as we examine ourselves, our churches, and our society for where racism is damaging us all, and help us work together to reflect your love to each other and to a hurting world. Amen.

Reflection:

Take a moment before we begin to silently ask yourself, “how much do I think I really care about racism? How much do I think God really cares about racism? Be honest with yourself about where you’re at.

What is Racism?

Racism is something The Presbyterian Church in Canada has taken a strong stance against, especially over the last sixty years. “*Growing in Christ: Seeing the Image of God in Our Neighbour*” *Policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for Dealing with Allegations of Racial Harassment* states, “Racism, therefore, is a violation, a trespass against God’s purposes. Racism defines the comparative worth of a person as a human being by characteristics of race, over against a person’s value as one made in the image of God. It assumes, explicitly or implicitly, that one human group is superior to another and lives out that belief in ways that harms or even exploits others regarded as inferior. Racism is often a combination of prejudice and power.”ⁱ

Racism often has roots in economic benefits that could be gained and maintained by a ruling class through creating policies, institutions, practices and attitudes that politically and economically disempowered other races. Slavery is one example of how this was accomplished but the policies, institutions, practices and attitudes that are specifically meant to benefit one race over others are often not as obvious as slavery—and many of those policies and practices still exist and thrive in Canada today. This is called *institutional racism* or also sometimes *systemic racism*.

It is easy to see and point at racism when it takes the guise of something like hate crime or slavery and speaking out against obvious forms or instances of racism such as those is necessary. But it is important to remember that one of the things that normalizes racism and leaves room for violence to take root and grow are the more subtle (but no less powerful) forms of racism, as well as the institutional racism that frames so much of our social, legal, political and policing interactions today. These things too must be identified and resisted in order to change the power racism holds over people and society. Working to end racism requires working on all these levels.

To say that The Presbyterian Church in Canada has taken a strong stance against racism is not to say that we do not still struggle as a church with racism in its legion forms, or that individual members do not engage in racist practices or statements. Rather, it is to say that the church recognizes the centrality of the Gospel message that God loves the world, and that we are called to love our neighbour—no matter who our neighbour is.ⁱⁱ It is also to say that the church recognizes the truth in Paul’s reminder: in Christ, there is *full and realized equality* so much so that Paul framed it as “neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female” in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Passages such as these are constant reminders that should hold us accountable. Doing the personal and institutional work of identifying and dismantling racism we have internalized as well as speaking out against interpersonal, institutional and structural racism is not just a “nice” or even “good” thing to do. It is the faithful duty of any Christian.

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love.”

—Nelson Mandela

The Presbyterian Church in Canada continues to work to find ways to eliminate racism in its policies and practices, including ways to build and maintain an ethos where racism is seen for the sin it is, which must be repented of and addressed. As we continue to work toward achieving these goals of true repentance and lasting, systemic change, we need to continue to examine and update our policies and practices, to ensure they foster the kind of community in which racism simply can't flourish.

In addition, every one of us must work to recognize where racism is operating in our homes, our churches, our schools, our jobs, and in society—and then work to address it.

Examining our Policies and Practices: An Exercise

At the 2019 General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church in Canada formally repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery. When it did so, it affirmed along with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that, “all doctrines, policies and practices based on or advocating for superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust.” (“Repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery,” Acts & Proceedings, 2019, pp. 368–378, 35.)

As a group or individually, name particular doctrines, policies and practices that advocate for the superiority of peoples based on the differences outlined here. Remember that such policies may operate not by saying outright that one race is “better” than others (though they may say that too), rather they may be more subtle, such as assuming that some people, based on their race, should be entitled to more or to less—more or less security, more or less health care, even more—or less—“second chances.” The “more or less” calculus that forms institutional racism can take the guise of many practices such as “Red-lining,” racial profiling, gentrification or lack of representation. How many can you name? How much sway do they hold in your life? How much sway do they hold in the life of the church, and in society?

Keep these things in mind as you continue working through the material. We'll come back to the things you named here closer to the end of this study. When you have finished making your list, continue on with this study.

Rising Hate: Racism, Harm, Violence and Death

It is of course not only the Church that struggles with racism. As recent data from across the country shows, there is an increasing number of people in Canada who escalate racist thinking to acts of hatred or even physical violence stemming from an intolerance of diversity. It has become clear, for example, that hate crimes in Canada are on the rise. According to the latest data from Statistics Canada that was available when this report was initially written:

- “In 2017, police reported 2,073 criminal incidents in Canada that were motivated by hate, an increase of 47% or 664 more incidents than reported the previous year.
- The increase in the total number of incidents was largely attributable to an increase in police-reported hate crimes motivated by hatred of a religion (+382 incidents) or of a race or ethnicity (+212 incidents)...

- Between 2016 and 2017, the number of police-reported crimes motivated by hatred of a race or ethnicity increased 32%, from 666 to 878. Much of this increase was a result of more hate crimes targeting the Black (+107 incidents) and Arab and West Asian populations (+30 incidents). Hate crimes targeting the Black population remained one of the most common types of hate crimes (16% of all hate crimes [reported]).
- Compared with 2016, the number of police-reported hate crimes motivated by religion rose 83% in 2017, from 460 to 842. Hate crimes against all religions saw increases. Police-reported crimes motivated by hate against the Muslim population rose from 139 incidents to 349 incidents in 2017 (+151%). Hate crimes against the Jewish population continued to rise in 2017, from 221 to 360 incidents (+63%).”ⁱⁱⁱ

It is important to note that these statistics represented *reported* hate crime; communities who are hesitant to report crimes targeting them, due to issues such as mistrust of police or social services, will be underrepresented in this data.

One of the factors leading to rising hate crime in Canada is online forums promoting hate or allowing room for it. These online spaces have contributed to the rising numbers of hate crime in the physical world, as reported in the recent report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights titled “Taking Action to End Online Hate.” As the report states, “online hate ‘undermines the well-being and sense of security of victims’ as well as their ‘sense of belonging.’ More generally, it increases discord in society and contributes to the marginalization of certain groups ‘by convincing listeners of the inferiority of the targeted group.’ As noted by Bradley Galloway from the Organization for the Prevention of Violence, ‘[t]he perpetuation of associated rhetoric can create an environment where discrimination, harassment and violence are viewed by individuals as not only a reasonable response or reaction but also as a necessary one. Online hate also contributes to radicalization of people and leads to the risk that sympathizers of hate speech will take action.’”^{iv}

But it’s not just hate crimes and radicalization that are a problem; even the more subtle and less obviously violent forms of racism increase the likelihood that people of colour will be targeted for harm, violence, or even death. This is because subtly reinforcing the idea that some people matter less (or more) through actions such as letting stereotypes go unchallenged or not speaking up when racist jokes or assumptions are made creates a sense that racism is *socially acceptable even if it is harmful*. Any time racist speech, action, or institutional structures are allowed to go unchallenged, it normalizes that sense that *it’s okay to harm certain people*. That leads to a spiraling domino effect where more people further internalize racist thinking, allowing still higher levels of social tolerance for discrimination, hate, and violence. When internalized racism reaches certain levels, we don’t even see that violence as violence anymore, it’s just “*the way things are*.”

“At the heart of racism is the religious assertion that God made a creative mistake when He brought some people into being.”

—Friedrich Otto Hertz

Discussion questions and an activity before we move on:

- 1 What were some of the things that stuck out to you in the statistics you saw here?
- 2 In the paragraph just above, there are three phrases in italics. Have you heard phrases like these before in conversations with people? How did it make you feel then? Do you feel different seeing them in the context of this study?

Reflection activity: Think of a news story you heard recently that involved racism. Then break into groups of two or three people and describe to each other the story you remember, or, if you are doing this study as an individual, write down what you remember on spend some time reflecting on it. How did it make you feel? Did you read past the first few paragraphs when you first saw the news story? Was it a story in your community or somewhere else? If it was somewhere else, do you think there are similar issues in your community? When everyone has had a chance to speak and respond, rejoin the larger group to continue the study.

White Supremacy

In addition to statistics such as those listed above, there is a deeply concerning rise of white supremacism certainly south of our border, but also here in Canada. For example, Barbara Perry, an expert on hate crimes and professor in the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology has noted that there are currently “at minimum” 130 active far-right extremist groups across Canada, which she points out is an increase of around 30 percent from 2015. She adds, “Most of these groups are organized around ideologies against certain religions and races, with anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish sentiments being the most common, followed by hatred for immigrants, Indigenous people, women, LGBTQ communities and other minority groups.”^v

These groups, often collectively referred to now as the “Alt Right,” actively recruit new members to their cause. Those who have left the movement explain that a primary tactic is using people who look and seem respectable to be the “face” of recruitment or interacting with the public. These individuals then find people dealing with insecurity, including in areas such as job loss or relationships. They identify the types of fears that person is experiencing and exploit those fears, blaming target minority groups such as those listed in the statistics above for the hardship, pain, or anxiety someone who is economically or relationally vulnerable is experiencing, and offering them a purported solution—to disempower or harm target groups in order to supposedly “regain” the power, wealth, security, or sexual relationships they “should” have instead, “by natural right.”^{vi}

The effects of such messages are chillingly apparent in the statistics cited here, and in other reports such as the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Addressing and ending racism is further complicated by the fact that many of the communities targeted can be hesitant to speak to police, since there has been a significant history of racism in police forces in Canada as well. This history, which continues to manifest itself today, has taken the shape of racial profiling,^{vii} overrepresentation of minorities being arrested and harsher sentencing for minorities,^{viii} and even police brutality and statistically increased likelihood of lethal force being used by police against minorities. A look at the numbers is telling: “Indigenous people make up only 4.8% of the population, yet represented 15% of total fatalities [of civilians shot by police]. Members of the Black community, which makes up only 3.4% of Canada’s population,

represented 9% of the fatalities. Both racial groups are disproportionately affected by police violence relative to other ethnicities.”^{ix}

Racism is deadly, and this is one of the reasons Christians must speak out against it. It has normalized a belief that Black lives don't matter as much as white lives. It has normalized a belief that Indigenous lives don't matter as much as non-Indigenous lives. It has normalized a belief that People of Colour are, and should be, second class. As we can see in incidents such as the 2017 shootings at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec, the 2018 shootings at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, and the 2015 Charleston Church shooting of Black parishioners, those beliefs that certain lives matter less than others has led to deadly mass assaults. As we see with stories such as the death of George Floyd at the hands of police while people watched, that belief that some lives matter less takes individual lives as well. And, to remind ourselves that this is not just a problem in “other places,” as we saw with the numbers above showing Indigenous and Black people in Canada are statistically significantly more likely to die in interactions with the police than their non-Indigenous and non-Black counterparts, we must acknowledge that racism is deadly for individuals here in Canada too.

We are all God's children, and must speak up and stand up for and with each other. We must all work to end systemic and interpersonal racism. Racism disrupts the heart of society, cutting through community relationships and alienating neighbour from neighbour. More than that, it speaks the message that some people are worth less than others, and so it matters less if bad things happen to them. That cannot be the witness of the church.

These trends of increased hate crimes and a rise in white supremacy in Canada are troubling, but the Church is not powerless to address them, and could be a voice and a model of how racism must be rejected in favour of diverse, inclusive and respectful communities. Earlier in this study, you identified doctrines, policies and practices that advocate for the superiority of one people over others. Now that we have worked through this study, think back to those policies, doctrines, and practices you named. Where are they found? What supports their power? How can they be changed? Take some time to discuss this with your group, and then close by considering these questions.

Closing Study and Reflection Questions:

- 1 When you heard the quote this study opened with—that “Racism practiced by the white-skinned against their darker-skinned brothers is one of the world's basic problems, and a blatant denial of the Christian faith”—how did it make you feel? Why?
- 2 What are some of the ways you see racism operating around you—in schools or at work? With law enforcement? In the court system? What are some ways you could address them?
- 3 Lastly, consider the quote from Living Faith that frames this study. What do you think it means, in your context, when it says to each of us that justice “demands the exercise of power for good”?

A list of resources for further study or reflection is included, but we encourage you, as you reach the end of your time together as a group, to close with prayer.

Prayers

We have included two prayers here to use in closing or as part of an ongoing spiritual practice to remain grounded in this important work to which God calls us. The first was written to be able to be prayed by an entire group together, no matter the group's racial makeup. The second prayer is intended specifically for use by people who are not part of racially targeted communities, to help orient faithful advocacy in supportive roles.

Creator God,
We know that we live and love imperfectly.
You called us to love our neighbour as ourselves
But collectively we have not, and individually we often fall short.
We say we all reflect your image
But when we act, we do not always show it.
For those of us living with pain or grief caused by racism,
we ask you, God, for healing and strength.
For those of us living with privilege and wondering what to do
Help us learn to listen and work to end racist systems that oppress.
As you came to set captives free
Free us all from those ways of thinking, speaking and acting
That belittle or harm any of your beloved creations
And show us again how to live in your love.

Amen.

God of life, of love
Jesus who knows anger in the face of oppression
Help me listen before speaking; help me hear what is needed before acting
Help me understand I am not here to lead, but support
And to learn how to do so well
Open my ears, my heart and my mind to the experience and the wisdom of those for
whom the stakes are already high
That they may be the prophetic voice that is heard

In this moment I add my voice to those already calling for justice
I add my hands to those already working to end injustice
They are the catalyst, I am a multiplier
A grain of yeast in rising dough
In so being, may I also stand as a witness to your love and service

Amen.

Resources for Further Study

Cracking open White identity towards transformation

A resource by CEARN (Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network, with the CCC)

The Canadian Council of Churches has put together an extensive list of resources specifically on anti-Black racism, which can be accessed here: <https://www.interculturalleadership.ca/wp-content/uploads/Resources-Anti-Black-Racism-Canada.pdf>

The National Indigenous Ministry Council, in collaboration with Justice Ministries, put together an interim report on the findings of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. That interim report can be downloaded here, under the title “The Effects of Colonialism”: <https://presbyterian.ca/gao/ga2020/>. A study engaging that report is forthcoming in the Summer of 2020.

A lengthier, multi-session study and discussion guide on racism and xenophobia in Canada is also forthcoming from Justice Ministries, and will be ready in the Fall of 2020.



Footnotes

ⁱ From “Growing in Christ: Seeing the Image of God in Our Neighbour” Policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for Dealing with Allegations of Racial Harassment, Assembly Council report, 2008; see A&P 2008, pp. 220–229; A&P 2008 pp. 429–430.

ⁱⁱ From the Social Action Handbook, “The Church Speaks” section: “Any form of segregation based on race, colour or ethnic origin is contrary to the gospel; It is not enough for churches and groups to condemn the sin of racial arrogance and oppression; Racism practiced by the white-skinned against their darker-skinned brothers is one of the world’s basic problems, and a blatant denial of the Christian faith; All forms of racism and apartheid are contrary to the mind and will of Christ.” Statements taken from A&P 1972, pp. 269–270, 59.

ⁱⁱⁱ Amelia Armstrong, “Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2017,” Statistics Canada, April 30, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00008-eng.htm>.

^{iv} Anthony Housefather et al, “Taking Action to End Online Hate: Report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights,” The House of Commons, June, 2019, p. 8–9, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/JUST/Reports/RP10581008/justrp29/justrp29-e.pdf>.

^v Jacky Habib, “Far-right extremist groups and hate crime rates are growing in Canada,” CBC, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/passionateeye/features/right-wing-extremist-groups-and-hate-crimes-are-growing-in-canada>.

^{vi} This is the process described by Elisa Hategan, former white supremacist, as cited in the Global News article “The Rise of White Supremacism and its New Face in the Twenty-First Century” by Emanuela Campanella and Elizabeth Palmieri, see <https://globalnews.ca/news/5329174/white-supremacy-white-nationalist/>.

^{vii} For just one discussion of this issue, see Brett Bundale, “‘For Black and Indigenous people it’s part of daily life’: The impact of racial profiling in Canada” Toronto Star, May 28, 2018. Accessible at <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/05/28/for-black-and-indigenous-people-its-part-of-daily-life-the-impact-of-racial-profiling-in-canada.html>.

^{viii} See for examples <http://johnhoward.ca/blog/race-crime-justice-canada/>. Accessed 9 February 2020.

^{ix} “17 Years of police violence in Canada,” PIVOT, accessed February 9, 2020, http://www.pivotlegal.org/17_years_of_police_violence_in_canada.



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