

Racial Justice & Anti-Racism in the United Church of Canada – A Snapshot in 2020

This document is a compilation of the work of the White Privilege Working Group, GCE Anti-Racism Task Group, and the GCO Program Staff meant to share the current state of the anti-racism work in the United Church of Canada. The complexity of issues contributes to the entrenchment of racist patterns in the life of the United Church of Canada. For dominant majority members it can be difficult to notice such racist patterns...it is sort of like a fish trying to describe water; it is simply around and in us. Yet other members do not experience our church as a safe space – this must change. Note: any attempt to change culture and bring about transformation requires a multifaceted strategy that is intersectional (meaning it takes into consideration all the identities we carry in life).

What The United Church Has Been Doing To Address Racism?

1960 and 1964	The church acknowledged racism as sin in response to the situation in Nova Scotia (removal of Black community and the destruction of their neighbourhood of Africville in Halifax, NS)
1986	Apology to the Indigenous Peoples
1987	The Division of Mission in Canada issues the worship and learning resource <i>Moving Beyond Racism</i>
1992	General Council acknowledges the need for anti-racist initiatives, calls for anti-racism resource materials for worship and education
1996	The Ethnic Ministries Council is inaugurated
1998	Apology to the Indigenous Peoples for Residential Schools
2000	GC 36 approved the Anti-Racism Policy (That All May Be One)
2001	<i>Ending Racial Harassment</i> – published as a way of animating the Anti-Racism Policy

2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. GC Minister of Racial Justice is appointed to assist the church to live out its commitment to becoming an anti-racist church (this position later became the GC Minister for Racial Justice and Gender Justice) b. The work of the national Racial Justice Committee continues, along with the newly-appointed GC Minister c. The Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network (CEARN) of the Canadian Council of Churches is established; the United Church was an active participant in this network, and in subsequent years, assisted with the creation of educational resources and workshops
2006	<p>GC 39 – approved the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>A Transformative Vision</i> and committed itself to becoming an intercultural church b. Mandates Racial Justice training for all ministry personnel c. Translation of the 1986 Apology to First Nations Peoples is completed in Oji-Cree, Swampy Cree, TH Cree, Oneida, Mohawk, Plains Cree Y, and Ojibway. It is also translated into French, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Portuguese, and Spanish.
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The first gathering of the Journeys of Black Peoples in the United Church b. The Task Group on Intercultural Ministries was established; it later offered a series recommendations to the national church, including several related to racial justice
2008	<p><i>Ending Racial Harassment: Creating Healthy Congregations</i> and <i>Ending Racial Harassment: Creating a Healthy Workplace</i>, produced.</p>
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. BC Conference apologies to the Japanese Church in Vancouver for its misappropriation of its building during the Japanese internment, and this apology is acknowledged at GC 40 in Kelowna, BC b. The work on Empire begins; a component of the Empire work includes a particular focus on Racial Power
2010	<p>General Council declares National Aboriginal Day June 21, a staff holiday so that GCO staff can intentionally engage in solidarity, engagement, and learning about Indigenous justice</p>
2012	<p>The United Church’s Executive of General Council agrees unanimously to disown the Doctrine of Discovery, a historical concept which has been used to rationalize the enslavement and colonization of Indigenous peoples around the world.</p>

2013	<p><i>Beyond Diversity: Courageous Conversations on Race</i> seminar held at the GCO (55 participants from across the country). The Deepening Understanding of Intercultural Ministries (DUIM) ecumenical program was established, and this 5-day program had a particular focus on racial justice. The United Church was actively involved in the development of this program, and many United Church people participated in the program in years to come.</p>
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The General Council Executive established the White Privilege Working Group and Reference Groups b. The United Church offers a briefing and related recommendations to the United Nations on anti-Black racism, through the UN's Universal Periodic Review c. The Forum on Intercultural Leadership and Learning (FILL) is established as part of the Canadian Council of Churches; it had an intersectional approach to its work including focus on diversity, just intercultural relationships, main focus on racial justice; the United Church is actively involved in its program and work
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. GC 43 received the Calls to the Church from the Indigenous Communities b. BC Conference and General Council make reparations to the Japanese United Church in Vancouver c. About 50 people from the United Church participated in the White Privilege Conference held at Ryerson University in Toronto; many participants commit to follow-up and action d. Partnered with the United Church of Christ to engage on the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (https://www.united-church.ca/news/joint-commitment-un-decade-people-african-descent) Partnering work done in 2007; video production in 2018
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The GCE extended the mandate of the White Privilege Working Group b. GCE establishes its Anti-Racism Working Group c. Revised and updated curriculum for Racial Justice Workshop (Sessions 1 & 2) was mandated for training by the Office of Vocation beginning May 2019 d. Submitted briefs respectively to (1) Canadian Parliament on online hate crime, and (2) United Nations' Special Rapporteur on reparations and other forms of racism and racial discrimination e. Participated and represented UCC at the Working Group of Experts on Peoples of African Descent f. Translation of Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures Accessibility into Korean g. Respective gatherings of the UCC Chinese Association, UCC Black Clergy Network, Korean Ministries Network, and Western Intercultural Ministries Network h. Return of the land connected to the historic village of Fairfield to the Eel to the Eelünaapéewi Lakhewiit Delaware Nation

2020

- a. Joint commitment with the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) on the International Decade for People of African Descent
- b. Joint commitment with the ACC and the ELCIC on anti-Black racism
- c. General Council Executive statement on Black Lives Matter
- d. New curriculum for Racial Justice Workshop (Sessions 3 & 4) are scheduled to be offered by September 2020 through the Office of Vocation

These are just a sampling of the work that the church has engaged. The question remains as to why, despite all the work that the church has engaged in over the past 60 years, it still feels like not much has happened.

The Current Situation

A critical part of assessing where we are currently is to identify and name Structural Racism (and specifically Anti-Black Racism) that is part of the culture of the church. All Canadian institutions are inherently racist, the United Church is no different.

1. Signs of structural racism in the life of the United Church

- a. Underrepresentation of racialized persons
 - a. In leadership
 - b. In the life of the church (Both elected and staff)
 - c. Communities of faith
- b. Lack of data on the following:
 - a. What is the percentage of racialized persons in the staff of the GCO (including regions)?
 - b. How many racialized individuals serve in Category 7 and above (the leadership teams)?
 - c. How many Indigenous people work in areas not related to Indigenous ministries?
 - d. What sensitivities are there to racialized staff?

2. What are the obstacles? In addition, how might we address these obstacles?

- a. Pastoral Relations Process
 - a. Congregations have the power to hire ministers
 - b. How might the polity be reshaped to create an equitable process

- b. Ignoring Community Context – This is a missional challenge.
 - a. The (local) church and processes seem to ignore the reality of its context.
 - b. Congregations do not have a mindset to recruit ministry personnel who reflect their neighbourhoods, especially in the urban centres.
 - c. This leads to the additional challenge that there are few Blacks in the pews.
 - c. Lack of Data
 - a. Prioritize upgrading the software in order to allow for data collection on ethnocultural backgrounds of ministers/clergy
 - b. Transparency on ethnicity/racialized data of ministers/clergy
- 3. Ideological Challenges** – We have been working on these issues for 60 years, yet it doesn't seem that we have gotten very far. Why?
- a. Our history is a colonial project – It is authored from the perspective of the White majority. Our history needs to be written from a variety of perspectives.
 - b. Canadian Culture generally, and specifically the UCC's culture of Whiteness, have given shape to how we think about ourselves.
 - c. Polity – our ways of organizing ourselves (structure and policies) unfairly advantage the White majority.
 - d. Theology – our understanding of God and our beliefs
 - e. Not a matter of background material or resources – instead we need to move spirits and transform hearts
- 4. We need a multifaceted strategy that is intersectional. It must address:**
- 1. Spiritual – there is a need for lamentation, repentance, and apology. There is also a need to explore what shapes our imagination – our understanding and reading of scripture, our hymnody, theology, and our liturgy.
 - 2. Cultural – there is a need to transform both cognitive and behavioural practices in the institution/system
 - 3. Structure – there is a need to develop anti-racist policies and reconceptualize polity that is equitable, Becoming anti-racist involves attending to policies and practices.
 - 4. Formation – there is a need to develop educational tools that will help people understand their own privilege. It will also be critical to engage with the theological schools in creating anti-racist curriculum.

Strategies Going Forward

Immediate Actions to Strengthen our Anti-Racist Strategy (which includes work on White privilege) :

1. Website – Improve the information about Anti-Racism, including the component on White privilege on the church website – raise its profile and offer resources for individuals and congregation to access
2. Equity Monitors – pulling together resources as well as a job description so that they can be used at all levels of decision-making in the church
3. Racial Justice Training – Increase the number of opportunities for people to access the racial justice training since it is often full with waiting lists
4. UCC Structures – where can we use a different lens to look at policy and procedures to uproot White bias, structural racism, and colour-blind policies? This can begin but we acknowledge this is a longer-term process. Create educational opportunities starting with Senior Leadership, managers, and regional council Executive Ministers and working throughout the staff structure
5. Policy Education – discussions are underway with Human Resources about training for the Workplace Discrimination, Harassment and Violence Prevention and Response Policy which, when approved, will include racial discrimination specifically. The Office of Vocations has trained new racialized investigators and we are asking to have everyone involved with the policy as part of their role to have some training on White defensiveness and White fragility so that anyone who accesses that policy doesn't encounter further harm.
6. Workshops – Creating workshops for three distinct groups that can be used anywhere in the church and are looking for some 'test groups' to further refine them.
 - a. White people who are not yet aware of or don't want to talk about racism – this needs to be accessible, friendly discussion about a difficult topic (Acknowledge)
 - b. White people in the UCC who are aware of racism and White privilege and who don't see their role/complicity and who want to learn more and do something (Confront)
 - c. White people in the UCC who understand the role of White privilege in structures and are ready to take responsibility for transforming church structures (Transform)

Possible Ways Forward Within Our Anti-Racism Strategy

1. Listen to the stories/have conversations – we tend to rush to strategies and proposals. We need to take the time to listen, learn, reflect, and discuss. This will require putting a plan in place to limit the revictimization of the storytellers, noting that not every racialized person wants to take part in training the larger church. What plans can we put in place to care for racialized members who do?
2. Encourage regional focus of work
3. Anti-racism should be a key principle of the Church. Use of ACTION suggested
4. Possible investment in training cultural and race-sensitive mediators in each region
5. Intentionally encourage dialogue between Indigenous peoples and racialized groups
6. Racism Harassment Policy – currently being worked upon
7. GC – affirm the need for the UCC to be an anti-racist church
8. GCE – discern the most effective ways for the GCE to offer leadership – to take concrete steps to move the work along and report to GC 44.
9. Use a strategy based on the acronym ACTION:

Acknowledging the reality of racism and the hurts experienced by racialized persons

Enable **C**onversations about racism and how to be anti-racist within the church

Transform current admission and pastoral relations processes to eliminate implicit bias or discrimination

Work alongside **I**ntercultural realization

Oppose institutional and systemic racism in the society

Create a **N**ew racial ethos in the church

There are a number of groups identified to have a part in the work structurally. It will be imperative that these groups have a clear understanding of who does what. Below is an attempt to identify some of the work. It is not conclusive, but a starting point.

Tools for Dismantling Systemic Racism					
Task	General Secretary/GCO	Regions	White Privilege Working Group	GCE Anti-Racism Working Group	Program Staff
Data Collection	Evaluate for program planning	Data from local communities of faith	Part of the educational resource collection	Ensure policies are in place	Evaluation and planning
Training	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Racial Justice for all staff 2. Racial Harassment training for all managers 3. Racial justice training for communities of faith 	Racial Justice Training for Search Committees, Church Councils, communities of faith	Identify curriculum and resources for training and formation and monitor impact and outcome	Policies about the requirement for training	Curriculum construction and animation
Anti-Racism Policy	Monitor and ensure compliance		Recommendations to the GCE	Review, update and monitor	Provide training and animation at all levels in how to use the policy
Racial Harassment Policy	Implement, ensure compliance			Review and ensure accountability	Provide training and animation at all levels how to use policy

Some final observations: As we engage this work we need to think about who is missing? We have heard the voices of our ministers. We have not heard the voices of people in the pew, nor have we heard the voices of the communities where we live & work. How does our commitment to attending to Anti-Black racism and becoming an antiracist institution might affect their lives?