



From Empathy to Action – A Discussion Guide Atlantic Baptist Women

(Leaders: Please read through guide before presenting to see necessary preparations.)

From Empathy to Action is a panel discussion on racism that was featured as part of interMISSION 2021. This discussion is introduced by Rev. Gail Whalen Dunn. The panel is facilitated by the Hon. Dr. Mayann Francis, and the panelists include Rose Dobrowolaki Wells, Rev. Dr. Joyce Ross, and Sierra Sparks.

The purpose of this panel is to listen, learn and consider about what our sisters in Christ on the panel are experiencing and to help us move from empathy to action. The discussion guide seeks to help us discover ways in which we can learn about ourselves, adjust our thoughts and behaviours, and grow to be allies of action who journey with and are led by those who experience racial discrimination. As Rose Dobrowolaki Wells, one of the panelists, comments, “Hear my story. Hear about my life. Walk in my moccasins and see with my eyes and hear from my heart and understand my story. Take my hand and walk with me.”

Jesus said: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34 NIV)

(Open with prayer asking God to open our hearts and minds. Watch the panel discussion on racism, From Empathy to Action. It can be found on the Atlantic Baptist Women YouTube channel as a separate video and as part of the larger interMISSION 2021 video at 58:45-minute point. The panel discussion video is 59 minutes in length.)

Ask: As you listened to the panel discussion, what stood out for you? *(Give time for responses.)*

To help us better understand the issue of racism, let’s explore a few definitions of terms used within the video.

1.) BIPOC – pronounced “by-pock”. This is an acronym which stands for “Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour” and is often used to highlight the racism and injustice faced by black and indigenous people.

2.) Racism - In her opening words of the panel discussion, Mayann Francis spoke of the importance of looking back to the days of colonialism and slavery to discover the negative psychological impact of racism on today’s society.

Racism is a belief that one group is superior to others performed through any individual action, or institutional practice which treats people differently because of their colour or ethnicity. This distinction is often used to justify discrimination. There are three types of racism: Institutional, Systemic, and Individual.¹

3.) Systemic racism –Sierra Sparks commented that systems are discriminatory because diverse perspectives are not being considered.

Systemic racism refers to the ways that whiteness and white superiority become embedded in the policies and processes of an institution, resulting in a system that advantages white people and disadvantages BIPOC notably in employment, education, justice, and social participation.

In a settler colonial state like Canada, systemic racism is deeply rooted in every system of this country. This means the systems put in place were designed to benefit white colonists while disadvantaging the Indigenous populations who lived here prior to colonialism. This power dynamic continues to be upheld and reinforced in our society, extending its impact on blacks and people of colour.²

4.) Stereotype – A stereotype is a preconceived overgeneralization of a group of people, ascribing the same characteristics to all members of the group, regardless of their individual differences.

Most of us fit into different categories and have a variety of interests. We might like watching sports but be non-athletic. We might like rap as well as classical music. But when we think about other people, particularly people who are a different race from us, we often have a harder time understanding that complexity. So we put people into categories and thus – stereotypes are formed.³

In addressing racial stereotypes, Joyce Ross said, “I know I am somebody, I have something to offer, and the color of my skin has nothing to do with my brain and knowledge so therefore I can stand beside you and do the same thing. So let’s get out of the way and get on with what we have to do and try to work in unity and success.”

Ask: What are some stereotypes you can think of? (some examples: all tall black men are good at basketball, all blondes are not intelligent, all girls like to wear dresses, all indigenous people are alcoholics, all Muslims are terrorists, all librarians are grumpy old women who wear glasses, all boys like to play with trucks, all girls like pink, all scientists are males, all nurses are females)

5.) Bias – A bias is a subjective opinion, preference, prejudice or inclination, often formed without reasonable justification, that influences an individual’s or group’s ability to evaluate a particular situation objectively or accurately. You can be aware or unaware of it.⁴

6.) Unconscious bias – We are unaware of our unconscious bias. Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one’s tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.⁵

7.) Microaggression - Microaggression is a term used for brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly culturally marginalized groups.⁶

Discussion: Say What?

It’s easy to say something and not recognize that our words may be projecting stereotype, unconscious bias or microaggression. Our intent may have been to compliment someone when in fact we have been hurtful. So we need to think carefully before we speak about how our words may be interpreted. Here are some common phrases that may project negative connotations rather than positive ones.

(Read the What You Said comment, then give time for the group to give their own answers about what they think was meant, then share what the hearer might have heard. Allow the group time to discuss their thoughts on these interpretations.

What You Said - "You are a credit to your race."

What You Meant – You are pretty amazing.

What the Hearer Might Have Heard - I have low expectations of people like you.

What You Said - "The only race is the human race."

What You Meant – I am trying to treat everyone as equal.

What the Hearer Might Have Heard - The way you are treated because of your race is not important/irrelevant.

What You Said - "As a woman, I understand how it feels to be a minority."

What You Meant – I'm trying to empathize.

What the Hearer Might Have Heard - All discrimination is the same; your personal experience doesn't matter.

What You Said - "I don't see color."

What You Meant – I'm trying to treat everyone equitably.

What the Hearer Might Have Heard - Your experiences as a person of color are irrelevant and not different from mine.

What You Said - "I have plenty of Black/Indigenous friends."

What You Meant – I'm trying to treat everyone the same.

What the Hearer Might Have Heard - What I say cannot be offensive. I am not a racist.

What You Said - "It's almost like you're not Black/Indigenous."

What You Meant – I did not expect you to act outside of the stereotypes I have of you.

What the Hearer Might Have Heard - All Blacks/Indigenous act the same.⁷

8.) White Privilege – In the video, Sierra Sparks spoke about how technology does not reflect a diversity of people and gave the examples of passport scanners and soap dispensers not recognizing darker skin tones. These are examples of white privilege.

White privilege is the inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice. This concept does not imply that a white person has not worked for their accomplishments but rather, that they have not faced barriers encountered by others.⁸

Activity: Identifying White Privilege

Peggy McIntosh, author of "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," comments: "I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group."

Let's do an activity together to further explain and identify what it means to live with white privilege using statements from Peggy McIntosh's paper.

(Print out the following statements and distribute among the group to be read individually when called upon. Allow time for the group to reflect on and respond to each statement.)

I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.

If I have low credibility as a leader, I can be sure that my race is not the problem.

I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.

I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.

I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.

Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.

I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.

I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.

I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.

I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.

If a traffic cop pulls me over, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.⁹

9.) Ally - As we become more aware of how our thoughts, words, and privilege affects others, we can journey towards positive change that will benefit all of society. An essential part of that journey is allyship with those who face racial discrimination. In her opening words of the panel, Mayann Francis quoted Dr. Kristin Williams on what an ally does: "An ally asks permission, an ally seeks help, an ally keeps learning, and an ally never stops."

Allyship is an active and consistent practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person of privilege seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group of people.

Allyship is not an identity—it is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people.

Allyship is not self-defined—our work and our efforts must be recognized by the people we seek to ally ourselves with.¹⁰

The Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation makes an important distinction between advocate and ally:

An Advocate:

- Supports a cause that directly relates to you or affects you.
- Speaks out and takes action for change.

An Ally:

- Listens, supports and advocates, but is not in the spotlight or the loudest voice. Stands with and not in front of.

The Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation then goes on to explain some things that an ally does:

- Understand your privilege
- Listen and do your homework
- Speak up, not over
- Apologize when you make mistakes
- Ally is a VERB (meaning that an ally is active)¹¹

Discussion: Let's talk about some of the things an ally does.

Ask: What does understanding your privilege have to do with being an ally? *(some examples: reveals the realities of injustice based on skin colour as you see things you never saw before, promotes awareness and empathy, encourages action)*

Ask: What does listening have to do with being an ally? *(some examples: promotes awareness and empathy, builds relationships, humbles the listener, teaches the listener to consider the perspective of another)*

Ask: What homework does an ally need to do? *(some examples: commit to lifelong learning, learning about Black and Indigenous history and culture through books, documentaries and other sources, learning about the effects of colonization and oppression on today's society)*

Ask: How can an ally speak up and not over? *(some examples: telling someone their racist joke or action is not funny, explaining to your white friends how they are privileged, following the lead of those experiencing racism rather than jumping in first to defend them)*

Ask: What does apologizing when making mistakes have to do with being an ally? *(some examples: mistakes will be made so learn from them and commit to doing better, apologise not to appease your guilt but because you were wrong, this humbles you)*

Ask: How can you be an active ally? *(some examples: boycott racially discriminatory businesses/corporations, donate to Black and Indigenous organizations, support and shop at Black and Indigenous run businesses, attend public cultural events, educate and talk with other white people about what you have learned)*

In her closing statement, Mayann Francis shared these words: “The church family must ask what role our faith community can play in our challenging world where in some situations there is such a sense of hopelessness, anger and fear. Every individual and sector must play a role to make our communities vibrant, exciting and economically healthy.... If we embrace change with faith, determination, healing, harmony, and action with the courage to promote positive ideals that will push the envelope, and make long lasting change, our communities including our church communities will be stronger and healthier.”

Activity: Write a personal action step

(Pass out “My Personal Action Step Against Racism” papers on page 7 and pens to each member of the group. Give members time to complete this, then ask them to share their steps with one another. Ask them to take this home and put it in a place where they will see it as a daily reminder to implement it.)

May we all do the hard work that is necessary for 15-year-old Nevaeh O’Connell’s dream to be achieved: “I want my generation to be comfortable enough to be open with our thoughts, be valued and optimistic for positive change no matter what their skin tone.”

Micah 6:8 says: He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (NIV)

Close in prayer.

My Personal Action Step Against Racism	My Personal Action Step Against Racism
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References

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