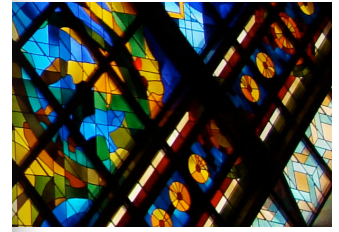




40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 40

Concluding the 40 Days



Learning

Adele Halliday

Some time ago, I was talking about the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism program with a friend of mine. They listened carefully as I described the upcoming 7-week period when people across the United Church would have opportunities to explore learnings, faith reflections, children's activities, commitments, and advocacy on a variety of themes related to anti-racism. After I had enthusiastically described the concept, my friend was briefly silent. They, they looked at me solemnly and said, "Do you really think that racism will come to an end after 40 days?"

I was briefly quiet too in response, and then we had a good discussion. The "end" of racism was never really the point of the 40 days. Racism is so deeply entrenched in so many of our systems, structures, policies, and ways of being that it is hard to imagine that a 7-week period would end such a pervasive system. Instead, the 40 days were designed to help deepen our

learnings, engage us in actions, and invite us to integrate anti-racist practice with our faith. These days were meant to help move, stretch, stimulate, encourage, and challenge all of us—and our church—into living more faithfully towards becoming anti-racist. And so, even though the 40 Days of Engagement is coming to an end, racism is not. And hopefully our collective engagement is not ending either.

I heard a similar sentiment about an "end" in the fall of 2020. At that time, the people of the United Church had made a commitment to becoming an anti-racist denomination. Many people, some long before my time, had been working hard for many years so that the church would be at a place where it was ready to declare such a commitment. For some, however, the commitment to becoming an anti-racist church was also an "end". Some people celebrated that the declaration meant that we as a church were *already*

anti-racist—that the declaration itself was the end of our work in this area because all of our struggles around racism had come to an end. But the "end" of our collective work on anti-racism also wasn't the point of the church's commitment either. Rather, the commitment was an invitation to re-engage with renewed energy, to re-commit, to further our work in becoming an anti-racist church. Racism has not at all ended, and so our work in this area cannot end either.

To me, endings and beginnings also remind me of covenants and covenantal relationships. A covenant is often described as an agreement between God and God's peoples. It's about promises made between people and God. In a covenant, there are mutual responsibilities that are grounded in relationship. Covenants too, can signal an ending—an ending of the way that things were before. It's an ending because people might agree to *not* do something. But it's a beginning—a new relationship.

A new commitment. A change in ways and behaviour that are long lasting. A way of being guided by God to live and be different. An invitation for accountability to one's self, and to one another, and to God.

At the end of these 40 days, could we covenant not to end our anti-racism engagement, but instead to commit to continue to work toward justice and equity?



Faith Reflection

Adele Halliday

Jesus knew that at some point, his ministry with the disciples and among the peoples was going to come to an end. He knew when he was going to die. Before his death, the Spirit led Jesus into the desert, and there, Jesus was tempted as he fasted for 40 days and for 40 nights. In Jesus' time in the wilderness, he relied on God to accompany him in his difficult times.

Jesus' death was an ending of sorts. But our faith reminds us that Jesus' death was not a final ending at all—but rather a new beginning. After Jesus' death and a time of mourning and grieving, Jesus was risen and was alive again! And Jesus' ministry began anew in a different way. He appeared to the disciples in a different form. He moved among the people on earth for many days.

Eventually—40 days after his resurrection—Jesus ascended into heaven to be with God.

Jesus left us a sign and symbol of this ending and beginning of his life: communion. When we engage in communion we are reminded that while Jesus has died, for Jesus, death was not the final answer or the end. We are reminded of our relationship with one another, our relationship with God, and Jesus' continued presence with and among us. We are also reminded that an end is also a beginning. We are reminded of an invitation to live in community and to be different. To continue our life and ministry remembering who Jesus was and is for us. And to go into the world as disciples who follow the example of Jesus in love, in action, in prayer, and in faithful service.

Perhaps too, the next time that we take communion, we might be reminded of our continued commitment to anti-racism and equity work.

As we take communion, may we be reminded of endings and beginnings with Jesus, of all of the ways in which in the Spirit leads us, and all the ways in which God accompanies us in this hard and joyful work of ministry.



Children's Activity

Adele Halliday

Materials needed: several different coloured beads, beading wire or elastic thread, scissors

An adult may want to measure the wire or thread so that it is long enough to circle around the children's wrists. Then, invite the children to make beaded bracelets by using any of the coloured beads and threading them one by one onto the pre-cut beading wire or the elastic thread. The children may want to thread their beads in a particular design or pattern. Once the children have finished threading the beads, tie the ends together so that it forms a circle.

This will be their bracelet. (For beading wire, you might need to

use crimps and clasps to tie it together, but for the elastic, it could likely be cut with scissors and the ends tied together in a knot).

After they have finished their creations, invite them to look at their bracelets. In what shape is their bracelet? Where does the bracelet start and where does it end? (The children might respond by saying that their bracelets are circles, or that the ending and beginning are in the same place, or that there is no ending and beginning.)

Engage the children to think about endings and beginnings. Are there times when, like their bracelet, an ending is also a starting

point? You might share that for every ending there is often a new beginning. For example, school ends but then it begins again. Christmas ends and a New Year begins.

Share with the children that sometimes our work against racism can have an ending and a beginning. We might finish learning in one way, and then start action in another way. Or, we might finish doing daily activities, and then start working on justice in different ways. Our work against racism is like a circle—the ending can also be a beginning. Invite them to wear their bracelets as a regular reminder of our work against racism.



Group Commitment

Adele Halliday

Reflect on what you might do to continue to commit to regular, ongoing anti-racism work and practice. One part of the United Church's anti-racism policy states that: "We believe that the struggle against racism is a continuous effort." Such engagement with anti-racism invites persistent, consistent, and faithful work.

What might such a continuous commitment mean for you?

Reflect on some of the past 40 days that you have engaged with. Are there other commitments that you have made previously? How might you incorporate these commitments into your regular life and ways of being?

At the end of these 40 days, what might you be committed to continue doing or to start doing?



Advocacy

Adele Halliday

A newly-formed United Church national committee, the Anti-Racism Common Table, has been working on the development of a national anti-racism action plan. The plan is being developed in the context of the General Council Office Strategic Plan, with initiatives building on the commitments to becoming an anti-racist and intercultural church. The plan lists five theme areas for engagement: theology, healing and accountability, governance, education and awareness, and advocacy.

One way of continuing to do advocacy would be to engage with the plan as a whole, and to specifically focus on the goals around advocacy. How might you and your community of faith be engaged in faithful advocacy on anti-racism?

More about the anti-racism action plan will be available on the [anti-racism section](#) of the United Church's website.



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