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## White privilege: a workshop By Jennifer Henry

**Reflecting on the unearned benefits of being white.**

The path towards racial justice is both an inward and outward journey. It's about turning in to address aspects of racism that persist in our churches, communities, families, and ourselves—and turning outward to advocate for racial justice in our world.

### PREPARATION

- Review the “Statements on Areas of White Privilege” (page 46) and adjust as per the facilitator or group.
- Review the “Detours” resource online and print off two distinct detours for each one of your small groups. Visit [culturalbridgestojustice.org](http://culturalbridgestojustice.org) and search for the resource called detour spotting.
- Set up the workshop space so there is a place for the full group and another for small groups (no more than six people in each smaller group.)
- Prepare one large, or multiple small, sheet(s) of paper with the definition of “white privilege” on it. (See the definition on page 44.)
- You will need two sets of small index cards per participant, and a place to visibly gather one set of cards at the front of the group space.

## INTRODUCTIONS AND FRAMING THE CONVERSATION (15 mins)

Welcome participants. Acknowledge the Indigenous territory on which you are gathered. (See [united-church.ca](http://united-church.ca) and search for “acknowledging-territory.pdf” for some general guidelines.) Encourage participants to consider this as a holy conversation where we strive to bring our best selves.

Introduce yourself, sharing something about your race, ancestry, traditional Indigenous territory where you were raised or now live, placement in your family, as well as any formal role or occupation you hold. Ask participants to turn to one of their neighbours and introduce themselves in a similar manner, or invite introductions around the circle.

If the group has ongoing norms to guide interactions, take a moment to remind them of these norms. You may also wish to propose some:

- Show respect for others’ feelings and ideas.
- Recognize that there may be differences in the group (in identities and experiences) and that those differences may not all be visible. Note that these differences make the topic riskier and harder for some.
- Try to speak for yourself, not for others.
- Limit your participation so that there is space for all to engage.
- Strive to stay on topic. While affirming “intersectionality,” or the interconnectedness of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, stay focused on race for this workshop.

## DEFINITION OF WHITE PRIVILEGE (20 mins)

Hand out sheets or display the larger sheet. Suggest that there are many definitions of white privilege but for the purposes of this workshop, the following one will be used. Read it through twice.

White privilege includes the unquestioned, unearned, most often unconscious, advantages, entitlements, benefits, choices, assumptions, and expectations

bestowed on white people based solely on membership in the culturally dominant, white group.

*Source: Cultural Bridges to Justice: [www.culturalbridgestojustice.org](http://www.culturalbridgestojustice.org); search under “white-privilege.”*

This concept is important because it helps us to see that racism is not only about intolerant, mean, or hateful beliefs/actions of individuals, but it is also systemic. There are structures and systems that deprive certain people or communities—people of colour and Indigenous peoples—while white people or communities benefit. Ask participants to silently reflect. On an index card, invite them to write down one reason why this work to acknowledge, and begin to dismantle, white privilege is important. Tell the participants that they will be asked to share what they write.

Rather than turning to the person beside them, invite people to walk across the gathering space and exchange what they have written with another participant and have a brief discussion. Then ask everyone to come to the front of the space and post what they wrote on a wall or board. Offer some comments drawing from your own thoughts, what people have shared, and/or the reflections below.

While integrity and humanity may be the key reasons to work towards racial justice, it is important to reflect on where we personally ground our commitment. Here are some possibilities:

- **Our Faith:** We believe that God’s love and justice is for each and all, and we affirm the sacredness of each person within a web of creation that is good. Systems that privilege one over another undermine those core beliefs.
- **Relationships:** We acknowledge that racism—individual acts but also systemic action—was and is deadly for Indigenous peoples, and people of colour, both in Canada and around the globe. Racism affects the collective Body of Christ.
- **Movements:** As people of faith, if we want to add our voice to and

witness movements of truth and reconciliation, Indigenous justice, and #BlackLivesMatter, we need to examine not just the racism “out there” but “in here.” How might we, even unconsciously, be acting out of, enabling, and/or supporting white privilege?

- **The Moment:** Recent political events appear to have made racism more visible and legitimate, endangering Indigenous communities and communities of colour. This requires us as church to give greater visibility and legitimacy to the dissent to racism and actions of equity and justice.

## EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF WHITE PRIVILEGE (15 mins)

Explain that we will now reflect on the benefits of white privilege as we read a series of statements. Let participants know that even if they have done this kind of reflection before, experiencing it again can offer different new insight. These are statements that address an area where white people, or groups, experience benefit—or are more likely to evade risk or harm. The participants are asked to reflect if this statement applies to them. Invite them to note if they feel the statement does apply. For some people, few or none may apply.

Read the “Statements on Areas of White Privilege” (page 46) slowly, repeating each one. Then allow time for silent reflection. Ask participants to be attentive to what is coming up for them. Ask people to think of a benefit that wasn’t listed. Now ask participants to share one thing that came up for them in this exercise with another group member.

As you close this part of the workshop, suggest that the purpose of this kind of reflection is not to discount achievements of white people, but to question prevalent assumptions of a level playing field. Unearned benefits need to be recognized so we can begin to dismantle the systems that create this kind of benefit (and hardship) along racial lines. And while staying focused on race for this conversation,



we can recognize that other areas of oppression can decrease benefit, or intensify deprivation or harm.

### EXPLORING DETOURS

(45 mins)

Ask your group to think of the work of dismantling white privilege as part of a journey towards racial justice and reconciliation. On this journey we can get distracted by our own interests and detour off the path. Here is a small group exercise that reflects on this possibility and helps us learn how to get back on the path as racial justice advocates. Remind the small groups of the norms suggested at the beginning of the workshop. Give each group two examples from the online “Detours” resource (see “Preparation.”) Ask them to look at the detours one at a time, and consider questions like:

- Does this sound familiar to you?
- If so, what impact have you noticed or what impact have you felt when this occurred?
- What are some strategies for addressing this detour and getting back on the path to racial justice?
- Is there another detour that you might name?

Ask the group to come to an agreement about one insight from their discussion that they would like to share with the full group. Allow 30 minutes for this exercise and then invite the groups back together to hear the insights.

### CLOSING (15 mins)

Remind everyone that the journey to racial justice reaches back to biblical times, through centuries of advocates. For Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour, the path includes the steps taken by their ancestors. Endurance and resilience of these communities must be acknowledged. Encourage the group to stay inspired. Ask people to go around the circle and name one person (living or dead) as an advocate for racial justice in whose footsteps we can follow. After each person is named ask the group to say: “With us.”

Hand out index cards and ask the group to reflect. On one side, participants write a personal “next step” for themselves on the road toward racial justice; on the other side, they write a “next step” they would like their church or community to take. Encourage people to keep their cards and look at them again in a month.

Thank people for their participation and close the event in prayer:

Gracious God, you love us into being. Your love and justice are for all. You place us in a web of creation that is good. Keep up on the persistent path towards transformation. Place your Spirit within us, She who cannot be captured by injustice or oppression. Make your Spirit bold and restless within us as we strive to create your beloved community here on earth. Hear our prayers of repentance, lament, solidarity and hope and remind us of your presence witnessed every day in one another. Amen.

**Jennifer Henry** is a white settler and the Executive Director of KAIROS. This workshop is drawn from many excellent existing resources and was developed with significant assistance and contributions from Julie Graham, Adele Halliday, and Susie Henderson. A version of this workshop was offered to the General Council Executive.



**AT THE CORRIDOR OF PRIVILEGE** Participants have said this workshop helped to reveal underlying assumptions and spark greater awareness towards continued conversation and action. Many suggested including this kind of education in meetings within the various courts (presbytery, Conference) of the church, as well as expanding participation in the ongoing United Church racial justice training.

## STATEMENTS ON AREAS OF WHITE PRIVILEGE

**THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS TO LEAD THIS WORKSHOP**, given the different identities of facilitators. If you are white, say the following as “I statements,” and ask the participants if the statement could also be applied to them. Encourage participants to note whether there is general concurrence as each statement is read slowly, and repeated. You may need to adjust statements to reflect your own experience and gender so they can be said with integrity. You can also read the statements as “you statements” and ask participants to determine the application to themselves and note it down.

1. No one in my family is healing from trauma or intergenerational trauma related to Indian residential schools.
2. If I approach social services for help, I can be confident that racial stereotypes will not be applied to me.
3. I've never had a stranger ask why I do not pay taxes.
4. I do not have to educate my child to be aware of systemic racism for her daily physical protection.
5. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
6. I can take a higher level job without co-workers suspecting I only got it because of an “equity-related” decision based on my race.
7. I can have a drink in a bar without fear of people judging me as an alcoholic.
8. When I learned about our Canadian heritage or about civilization, I am shown that people of my race made it what it is.
9. When I say I am from (Canadian city/town), I am not asked where I'm really from or “what” I am.
10. If my vehicle is pulled over, I can be pretty sure that it was not because of my race.
11. If I go to hospital, healing methods drawn from my culture are also readily available to me.
12. I can go shopping without being concerned about being watched or followed by security.
13. While violence against women is still a threat, the incidence of violence against me is far less than women of other racial groups.
14. I can always vote for a candidate that reflects my race.
15. I can advise a teen or younger person of my race to go to the police for help without additional worry or fear regarding that interaction.
16. I generally don't need to worry about how my ethnic group or community is portrayed in the media.
17. Acquaintances and strangers don't assume I got a free post-secondary education.
18. I have very few family members or friends whose children have been apprehended by child welfare.
19. I can be sure that if I need a loan or legal help my race will not work against me.
20. Most places I go, including the church, I feel part of the community rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
21. I can facilitate this kind of workshop and people will not automatically think I am pushing my own personal agenda.

Sources: *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* by Peggy McIntosh; *The Benefits of Being White* by Paul Kivel; *White and Settler Privilege: The Invisible Backpack* by Julie Graham.

## RESOURCES ON WHITE PRIVILEGE

- *Cracking Open White Identity Towards Transformation: Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network Examines White Identity, Power and Privilege* by the Canadian Council of Churches
- United Church of Canada's Racial Justice Training. Search for racial justice training on [united-church.ca](http://united-church.ca)
- United Church of Canada's *That All May Be One* policy statement on anti-racism. Search on [united-church.ca](http://united-church.ca)
- World Council of Churches' *Transformative Justice: Being Church and Overcoming Racism: Resource Guide*. Search for this on [oikoumene.org](http://oikoumene.org)
- *The Benefits of Being White* by Paul Kivel. Search for this title on [organizingforpower.org](http://organizingforpower.org)
- *Detour Spotting for White Anti-Racists* by Jona Olsson. Search for this title on [culturalbridgestojustice.org](http://culturalbridgestojustice.org)
- *White Privilege and Lament* by Richard Manley-Tannis. Search for this title on [kairoscanada.org](http://kairoscanada.org)
- *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* by Peggy McIntosh. Search for this resource on [deanza.edu](http://deanza.edu)