



### Racial Justice: a 10-point action plan for churches

1. **Acknowledgment:** An acknowledgment of the issue of racial injustice and its systemic and institutional nature.  
*Take a look at the [Racial Justice page](#) on the Diocese of London website, and the [‘Lament to Action’](#) report by the Church of England’s Anti-Racism Taskforce.*
2. **Audit:** An honest look at ourselves and our churches and where we are in relation to the issue of racial injustice.  
*Explore your context by using the tool on this website: <https://cuf.org.uk/lookup-tool4>  
What is the racial diversity percentage of your parish? How does this compare with a) your church community, b) PCC, and c) leadership?*
3. **Conversation:** Facilitating a series of conversations - creating the spaces for open, honest and frank conversations. Listening to the voice of the GMH/UKME community, starting with those in your sphere.  
*You could engage with the ‘questions for reflection’ found at the end of this document.*
4. **Education:** Bridging the knowledge gap. What is it like to be a person from GMH/UKME background in the UK today? Understanding the historical context. The damage to the psyche of GMH/UKME people by sustained and systemic racism.  
*Watch [this conversation](#) with Lusa Nsenga Ngoy, Bishop of Willesden, on ‘Race and Culture in the Church in the UK’, and [read this blog](#) by Synodical Secretary Monica Bolley.*
5. **Speaking Up:** Using our platforms to speak out against the evil of racism. This would be speaking out into the larger society but also speaking out into our own churches and organisations.  
*At the end of this document is an article by Bishop Graham Tomlin, which could be used to inform a sermon.*
6. **Advocacy:** Using our influence and reach to be advocates for racial equality. It is the changes in structures that can deal a death blow to racism.  
*The Diocesan Racial Justice Priority Group issued [a statement](#) in response to the Anti-Racism Taskforce report which makes clear the structural issues that we need to address and culture change that needs to follow. Have you appointed a racial justice champion on your PCC?*
7. **Representative Leadership:** Creating systems, structures and processes that encourage representative leadership in our churches and organisations.  
*Is your PCC representative of the racial diversity found within your churches? Or your parish community? Have you encouraged someone from a GMH/UKME background to stand for*

*Deanery, Diocesan or General Synod?*

8. **Practical Action:** Developing short-, medium- and long-term plans for action.  
*Do you have a Racial Justice plan for your parish?*
9. **Prayer:** Encouraging sustained prayer as individuals, as a group and within our churches over the issue of racial injustice, recognising the deep complexity and hold which the issues of racial injustice has on humanity.  
*All are welcome to [sign up](#) to receive the monthly Prayer Bulletin of the Racial Justice Prayer Network.*
10. **Prophetic:** Discerning God's mind clearly and ensuring that our actions and narratives are driven by this and centered very clearly around Jesus and rooted firmly in the word of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Holy Trinity Brompton, Racial Justice and Equality, <https://www.htb.org/racialdiversity> [accessed on 12 Feb 2022]

### Questions for reflection

These questions can be reflected on as individuals, leaders, staff team or as a PCC. We recommend you reflect on these questions in as many groups as possible.

**Note:** *If there are GMH/UKME members within your group when completing this evaluation there are two mistakes that can be made. Every GMH/UKME person's experience is different and unique. They do not represent the entire GMH/UKME community. They will neither want to be singled out as experts to carry this entire discussion, nor will they want to be ignored. They will require a safe space to contribute at their own pace when they feel ready, and to have their voice heard.*

1. Share your reactions to Bishop Graham's paper on 'Grace and Race' (found below)
2. Do you think Racial Justice is a priority for your Leaders, PCC and your Parish? If not, why not?
3. Are you aware of the issues that impact your GMH/UKME members? (White privilege, lack of empathy, microaggressions, mental health and wellbeing).
4. Do you embrace difference and seek to learn from it? Or do you feel challenged by difference and seek to deny it exists? Are you open to be changed, or do you seek to change others?
5. Just because you can't see racism around you does not mean it isn't happening. How could you develop a 'safe' environment where GMH/UKME members present in your church can regularly share their experiences and feelings?
6. In your opinion, would a GMH/UKME member consider you an ally who would champion their cause; or part of the problem? And why?
7. The early church was known for its radical love and unity. Where is this evidenced today? How can we reflect God's love more fully?
8. What experiences do you have of being led or managed by a person of a different ethnicity? How can you better engage with racial justice in your church?
  - a. unconscious bias training
  - b. conversations around race sessions facilitated externally
  - c. collaboration with other minority groups
  - d. promote intercultural placements
  - e. review role/job descriptions for bias
  - f. focus outreach, internships and work experience to attract GMH/UKME candidates
9. What specific actions are you taking this year to increase inclusion? (See 10-point action plan)
10. How could you start a conversation with a GMH/UKME member within your church to find out what issues matter to them?

## **Bishop Graham's reflection, Grace and Race**

Let's be honest. Many of us (though not all) in the church have often felt in the past that questions of race and ethnicity are at best marginal, at worse a distraction from the gospel. When I did my initial theological training in the 1980s, I don't recall any particular discussion of race. It seemed like a special interest of a few people, and not something essential to think or do anything about.

Yet I for one have begun to discover that questions around ethnic and cultural diversity are not marginal, but in fact take us to the heart of the gospel – not least because St Paul seems to have thought they did. There was a well-known occasion, referred to in Galatians 2.11- 14, when Peter started to feel uncomfortable about meeting and eating in a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles in the church in Antioch. Eating together had great symbolic and social significance at the time and such a gathering implied to him and to others that the ethnic distinction between Jew and Gentile was no longer of fundamental importance. Under pressure from the more conservative Jewish-Christian groups, probably from the Jerusalem church, Peter started to withdraw from such mixed racial gatherings.

You might have thought Paul would have respected Peter's choice, and let it pass. Each to his own, you might say. Not a bit of it. This was, for Paul, something so crucial that he opposed Peter 'to his face'. Remember this was Peter the Apostle, who had known Jesus in the flesh, upon whom Jesus had said he would build his church, the one who had an unparalleled position of authority within the church. Opposing Peter in this way was risking Paul's entire ecclesiastical career, if he can be said to have had one at this stage!

Why did Paul think this was such a big deal? A recent book by the Professor of New Testament in Durham University, John Barclay, explores Paul's theology of Grace. He shows how first century Greek and Roman culture was organised around a competition for honour and respect. Gifts and favours were a common way of lubricating social relationships and in that context, gifts would be given to those who were deemed to be worthy of the donor's generosity. The expectation was those gifts would be reciprocated to cement alliances, create relationships and enhance one's own social standing and respect within wider society. Roman citizens would not generally give gifts to the poor because they could not return the gift, leading to embarrassment all round.

God's gift of Jesus Christ however had been given irrespective of ethnicity, gender, wealth or status. It was a gift of grace that paid no attention to the worth of the recipient (although it did still expect a response and a change of life - it was unconditioned but not unconditional). This was the radically new message of the gospel, that the grace of the God of Israel was now available to all people, no matter what their racial background.

Peter's action therefore implied that the gift was just like other gifts in that culture, given only to the worthy, on the basis of ethnic identity, primarily to Jewish people and only secondarily to Gentiles. It implied that Gentiles were not full members of the community because of their race, and because the gift was, after all, given according to ethnic status or identity.

That's why Paul thought Peter's action was such a betrayal of the gospel and could not just be allowed to pass. It was not ethnicity, status or wealth, but the gracious gift of God that was the currency that

mattered in these new experimental communities on the edge of empire, centered around the grace, or generosity of God. This just didn't fit with the normal categories of honour, gift and race at the time.

Instead, baptism gave a radical new identity – formed not around the Jewish Law, social status, or any other identity marker for that matter, but the presence and gift of Christ and the Holy Spirit – what Paul called a 'new creation' (2 Cor 5.17). It is why we give babies a new name at their baptism - a Christian name, different from their received family surname, indicating their new self in Christ, that their identity is not defined by family reputation, but by the worth given to them in Jesus Christ.

If in our structures, our forms of leadership and normative culture within the church we privilege one particular culture, making those from other cultures feel second rate or allowed in as visitors but not really valued as fully participant and valued members of the church, then we are making the same mistake as Peter did. We are denying the gospel of grace that is offered regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, wealth or status.

Presumably Peter himself had to re-think his own attitudes in the light of this incident. He had already seen the need for Gentiles to be brought into the new community (Acts 15.7- 11) yet he still had more to discover as to the full implications of what this meant.

Attitudes to race are complex – the world is not neatly divided into racists or non-racists. We are all on a journey to discover the significance of God's radical gift of grace.

Grace and race are linked together. It is vital that we are able to create churches that are welcoming to all cultures and deliberately try to form genuine intercultural space which enables the expression and gift of all cultures to be received in the context of Christian faith. Prejudice is subtle and we often underestimate the gifts of others due to our own preconceived ideas about people who are unlike us. This does not mean ignoring or being ashamed of our own particular cultures, but both critiquing them when they are sinful and valuing them when they reflect God's boundless wisdom. As Barclay puts it: "mutual welcome will require the members to relativise their traditions - not necessarily to abandon them, but to subordinate them to the higher goal of serving Christ."

It is the gospel, not a secular agenda that drives the Church's vision to combat racism and to see our churches genuinely reflect the varied and multi-faceted wisdom and grace of God in Christ. If we are able to respond to this with humility, creativity and a willingness to learn, we might just enable something to emerge in our churches that is truly glorious, beyond what we are able to anticipate or image. We might see churches in London and beyond that truly reflect God's generosity of welcome and that reflect, not just the diversity of our city, but the city which is to come – the city of Grace.

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