

SACRED GROUND

A FILM-BASED DIALOGUE SERIES ON RACE AND FAITH

PARTICIPANT PREPARATION GUIDE



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This section is to help dialogue circle participants prepare for taking part in successful dialogue groups.

I. TIME COMMITMENT

Sacred Ground is a 10-session dialogue series. The hope is that this fuller commitment will give groups time to grow in relationship and to cover terrain that simply cannot be traversed quickly. Making a commitment to the full 10 sessions is a powerful sign that we are engaging in what is actually a lifelong journey. It took centuries, and one's own entire lifetime, for harmful racial patterns to be put in place; it takes an investment of time and attention to undo the internal and external harms.

If you need to miss a session, please 1) take time to watch and read the relevant material, and 2) get caught up by speaking with someone who was present.

The assigned films and readings will seem manageable to some and perhaps a lot to others. There is a maximum of 90 minutes of film/video to watch per session, and an average of 35 pages to read. We erred on the side of offering more, knowing that people can opt to decrease from there. Some of you will want to absorb more than is assigned, so we have provided a “Deeper Dive” addendum to the *Study Guide* with additional suggestions. Please decide as a group with your facilitator whether you want to commit to all of the primary viewing and reading, and what that might suggest about how often you meet (there is more on this in the “Facilitator Preparation Guide”). The “Sneak Preview of Syllabus and Films” page in the “Getting Started” section of this website allows you to see what the assigned material will be prior to signing up and getting the entire *Study Guide*.

2. CURRICULUM CONTENT AND HOW TO ACCESS IT

a. Films/videos

A powerful set of documentary films and short videos has been curated to form the spine of this dialogue series. Sometimes there is more than one per session, but in all cases, it is a maximum of 90 minutes of viewing. You will decide as a group whether to watch them together when you gather, or at home as homework (alone or in small groups), or a mix.

In terms of access, a few of the films/videos are currently available online at no cost, and those links are embedded in the session-by-session *Study Guide* pages.

In the case of the majority of films that have been programmed for this series – full-length documentaries and episodes of documentary series – The Episcopal Church has purchased streaming licenses in order to provide access to them on the Church’s website. They can be viewed at no cost by congregations that are hosting dialogue circles, but there are some important restrictions that come with these licenses that we ask you to respect (see below). This is why the *Study Guide* section of these webpages is password-protected. As with the material that is free elsewhere online, the links to these films also are embedded in the session-by-session *Study Guide* pages.

Your circle initiator or facilitator will provide you with a password to access the *Study Guide* section of the website once he/she has registered and received it.

If you are viewing the films at home, you will need a fast enough internet connection to stream them. Ideally, you would view them on a large screen at home for maximum impact.

b. Core books

There are two core books that we are asking participants to read over the course of most of the series. They are *Waking Up White* by Debby Irving, and *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Dr. Howard Thurman. These were selected because of the powerful ways in which they speak to mindsets of privilege, on the one hand, and to mindsets that can result from being the target of oppressions such as racism.

Please either purchase these two books, or seek them from a local library. If they are cost-prohibitive for you and not available at a library, please speak with the facilitator about getting assistance (perhaps congregations can cover costs).

For *Jesus and the Disinherited*, the reading assignments will take you sequentially through the whole book, since it is short. For *Waking Up White*, in the interest of not overloading participants with too much reading, most of the first two-thirds of the book have been assigned, but I highly recommend reading the entire book at some point. You may even wish to decide as a group to take on the whole book. The syllabus can be amended accordingly by the facilitator.

For both books, in the interest of reading them sequentially, the assigned chapters do not necessarily correlate with the specific content of the respective sessions. They are on their own track, so to speak. And the session-by-session themes/overviews that I have written are, therefore, not focused on the readings from these two core books. I feel certain, however, that the material from these books will provide a rich side-by-side dynamic with the session-specific films and readings, provoking much good discussion.

c. Session/theme-specific readings

For each of the 10 sessions, the assigned readings and film(s), except for the core books, are specific to the theme of that session. Some of the readings are accessible via links to materials that are available online, such as articles (clickable directly where the readings are listed). Others are available directly on the *Sacred Ground* webpages (also clickable). For the most part, these latter readings are excerpted page selections from books. The reproduction of this content required permissions from publishers, which we have received. As with most of the films, these permissions require creating password-protection. So again, please respect the copyright and do not share the password or these materials with others outside of your *Sacred Ground* dialogue circle.

The full books from which we are excerpting are highly recommended for further reading. Some of you may already own some of these books. In the event you would prefer to read from your book than from a PDF, we have provided page numbers, indicating whether they are from the hardback or paperback edition. But everyone else can just click through to the PDFs where the assigned pages have been assembled.

3. RESTRICTIONS

As indicated above, The Episcopal Church has secured licenses for all films and permissions for all readings that required them. There are restrictions/stipulations that are part of those agreements. Please respect the filmmakers, distributors, authors, and publishers by adhering to the following parameters:

- One stipulation of our licensing agreements with film and book rights holders is that *Sacred Ground* dialogue circles must have an Episcopal congregation (or other Episcopal entity) as the lead in their formation. It is acceptable for there to be other church partners from other denominations/faiths, or for the circle to be open to the local community and to meet in another space, as long as an Episcopal institution is the lead organizer of the dialogue circle. If you are from a congregation from another denomination and no Episcopal partner is available to work with you, please contact us to discuss whether you might interest your denomination in securing rights to the films and readings for broad use in your denomination.
- The *Study Guide* and curricular materials are located in a password-protected area of this website in order to restrict access to copyrighted material to only those registered for dialogue groups. Once your circle organizer registers your group, he/she will receive a password to share with circle members. You are strictly prohibited from sharing that password and, by extension, the copyrighted films and readings with anyone outside your dialogue circle. Exception: When a film/video or reading is made available in the syllabus through a link to a web address that is outside of the *Sacred Ground* password-protected area of The Episcopal Church website (i.e., via a freely accessible web address) then you are of course permitted, and encouraged, to share that with others.

- An important example of prohibited use of films: Our licenses do not permit the screening of the films for your full congregation or broader community. They are only for screening by the dialogue circles that are engaged in the 10-session series. If members of the dialogue circle are inspired by one of the films and wish to share it with the whole congregation for a dialogue event, then your congregation will need to acquire the public performance license (and DVD or streaming access) from one of the film's distributors.

4. DISCLAIMERS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LIMITATIONS

The views expressed in the films and the readings do not necessarily represent the views of The Episcopal Church, the *Becoming Beloved Community* staff team, the advisors to this series, or me as the *Study Guide* author. Hopefully, they provide good food for thought. Please excuse one or two instances of the use of profanity.

Speaking as the *Study Guide* author, I also want to take a moment to acknowledge the inherent limitations that come from my walking in the world as a person defined as “white,” and how that creates the potential for blinders with respect to how I have curated this series and what I have written. The films and readings in the syllabus come from various sources, created both by people of color and white people. I have striven to have a helpful and representative range of voices, and to let various groups “speak for themselves.” The series has also benefited from the thoughtful recommendations of the project’s diverse set of advisors. But it is important to acknowledge limitations. The session on Indigenous history, for example, does not represent Indigenous Native American history in its totality, which is by its nature multi-tribal and heterogeneous. Indigenous history is most appropriately and ideally taught by Indigenous people themselves, in a culturally appropriate context that involves storytelling, the sharing of wisdom by the elders, and the passing down of sacred myths that define the essence of Indigenous identity. The same could be said for other communities.

I hope and pray that I have done right by the communities of color whose stories and experiences are woven throughout the curriculum. I hope and pray that I have wisely evoked the stories and experiences of people of European descent. I hope and pray that the series, with all of your voices woven in, will move us closer to becoming a healthy human family, a beloved community.