

Opening Prayer (Facilitator)

UMC Discipleship Ministries offers [Praying for Change: Daily Prayers for Anti-Racism](#) as a resource for prayer.

History of The Central Jurisdiction

During the Jim Crow Era, the Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Methodist Protestant Church discussed plans to merge. In 1939 the merger was agreed upon only after a compromise with the Southern branch that demanded a separate and segregated jurisdiction based solely on race, not on geographical location. 19 black annual conferences were placed into one central jurisdiction until 1968 when the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren (which was not segregated) merged to become The United Methodist Church. [Click Here](#) to learn more about race and separation in The Methodist Church.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you have any personal experience with the Central Jurisdiction and segregation in The Methodist Church in America? Was this arrangement familiar to you, or is this new information?
2. What emotions, reflections, or reactions do you have as you learn about our history?

Scriptural Passage:

Acts 10: 7-19, 28 CEB (Cornelius and Peter experience a vision)

“At noon on the following day, as their journey brought them close to the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted to eat. While others were preparing the meal, he had a visionary experience. He saw heaven opened up and something like a large linen sheet being lowered to the earth by its four corners. Inside the sheet were all kinds of four-legged animals, reptiles, and wild birds. A voice told him, “Get up, Peter! Kill and eat!” Peter exclaimed, “Absolutely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” The voice spoke a second time, “Never consider unclean what God has made pure.” This happened three times, then the object was suddenly pulled back into heaven.” Acts 10:7-19

“He said to them, “You all realize that it is forbidden for a Jew to associate or visit with outsiders. However, God has shown me that I should never call a person impure or unclean.” Acts 10:28

The full story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 adds more context to the discussion.

Meditation:

Peter witnessed the power of The Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The power that descended on people regardless of race, creed or language, and Peter invited all gathered to “change your hearts and lives” and to be baptized. Acts 2:2

After such a powerful witness, God still had work to do in Peter's heart. Peter continued to follow his Jewish heritage and tradition regarding eating anything unclean or impure.

Discussion Questions

1. Peter witnessed the Holy Spirit resting on people of diverse backgrounds, languages, and races, and their desire to be baptized. This experience did not change Peter's attachment to his Jewish tradition and heritage. What habits of mind needed to change in Peter?
2. Peter heard the voice of the Lord three times. What's the significance of these words from the Lord?
3. Acts 10:28 from The Message translation states:
"You know, I'm sure that this is highly irregular. Jews just don't do this—visit and relax with people of another race. But God has just shown me that no race is better than any other."

Discuss Acts 10:28 in terms of racism, White superiority, and exclusion or inclusion of all races or nations in your local church or context.

Video

The video is a personal story of one African American family whose roots in Methodism began in 1892 prior to the Central Jurisdiction. A family that chose to stay in the Methodist Church with its separation and segregation. A story that includes Bishop Leontine Turpeau Current Kelly, the first African-American woman bishop to be elected in The United Methodist Church.

Discussion questions

1. Have you ever been part of a group where your voice, ideas, or culture differed from the dominant culture or the majority? Describe your experience.
2. Some African Americans chose to stay in the Methodist Church, while others left. Can you imagine whether you would have stayed a minority voice in the church or would you have left the denomination?
3. What might we learn from the faithfulness of African American believers when faced with racism in Methodism, in the church?
4. The Methodist Church in America has been a segregated church for most of its history. What thoughts do you have about how we might change this?
5. How do you think our history of racism and continuing reality of racial separateness affect our witness in an increasingly diverse country?

Ideas for action

1. Visit the [General Commission on Religion and Race](#) to learn more and access resources.
2. Invite an African American lay or clergy person to share his or her story about their journey in the UMC.
3. [UMC Discipleship Ministries](#) has a toolkit to begin courageous conversations.

Closing Prayer

Participant: Dr. Angella Current-Felder

Dr. Current-Felder is the daughter of Bishop Leontine Kelly. [Click Here](#) for more information.