

# Resources for Racial Justice Engagement



Compiled by the Racial Justice Stewards of MPUC



# Content

## **Shared Agreements & Keeping the Space 4**

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## **Definitions 6**

---

## **Grounding and Centering 10**

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Helpful Reminders

The Role of Grounding and Centering

Somatics Examples

Practice Examples

## **Reflection and Awareness 20**

---

The Role of Reflection and Awareness

Example Questions

## Shared Agreements

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***We celebrate people showing up for the work of racial justice and we will continue to show up.***

***We believe everyone has something to contribute and everyone has something to learn.***

***We practice curiosity of ourselves and others.***

***We risk vulnerability, sharing our personal lived experience.***

***Thank you for joining us in discernment!***

# Keeping the Space

“Keepers-of-the-Space” will be essential to our practice of “embodied equity” at Macalester Plymouth United Church during our year of discernment (and beyond). While anyone can support “keeping” the space, this specific role is intended to help conversations and experiences stay focused on race and antiracism, and to give participants opportunities to practice awareness and reflection.

It is highly recommended that every Year of Discernment activity have a designated “Keeper-of-the-Space” to engage in any or all of the following:

- Leading the grounding and centering practice(s)
- Reminding the group of shared agreements
- Pausing to acknowledge somatic shifts, big feelings, or “aha” moments
- Redirecting the conversation to embodiment and/or race
- Asking awareness and reflection questions

# Definitions

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**Antiracism:** Antiracism is a process of actively identifying and opposing racism. The goal of anti-racism is to challenge racism and actively change the policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions. Antiracism is rooted in action. It is about taking steps to eliminate racism at the individual, institutional, and structural levels. (from [verywellmind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-anti-racism): *What is Anti-Racism*)

**BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

**Equity:** The term “equity” refers to fairness and justice and is distinguished from equality: Whereas equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances. The process is ongoing, requiring us to identify and overcome intentional and unintentional barriers arising from bias or systemic structures. (definition from [NACE - National Association of Colleges and Employers](https://www.nace.edu/what-is-equity))

**Embodied Equity:** An experiential approach to justice, accountability, and transformation. This approach centers on body awareness and uses intentional practices to acknowledge the ways race, racism, and white supremacy show up in the body. The goal of embodied equity is to increase awareness and reduce harm in racial justice efforts and education.

**DISembodied INequity:** The conscious or unconscious "pushing down," ignoring, and/or being ignorant to a body's signal that there is a racial injustice happening. This may result in complicity in white supremacy culture, or the perception thereof. *E.g., thinking, "Something feels wrong and I don't know what to do / how to approach it." Or, "I can't change this/them," Or, "I wish I would have said something / said that differently."*

**Intersectionality:** A term coined by law professor and civil rights advocate Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw. It is a framework that helps us to explore the dynamic between coexisting identities and connected systems of oppression, particularly as it relates to gender and race and the experiences of Black women. (from Layla Saad in *Me and White Supremacy*)

**Hidden Curriculum:** A set of lessons which are learned but not openly intended to be taught in school (and other institutions) such as the norms, values, and beliefs conveyed in both the classroom and social environment.

**Microaggressions:** Microaggressions are defined as the everyday, subtle, intentional — and oftentimes unintentional — interactions or behaviors that communicate some sort of bias toward historically marginalized groups. (For examples and a deeper discussion of this topic, check out this interview on NPR with Kevin Nadal: [MicroAggressions Are a Big Deal](#))

**Reverse-Racism:** DOES NOT EXIST. There are assumptions and stereotypes about white people. However, such assumptions and stereotypes are examples of racial prejudice. Remember, racism = prejudice + power. (from [Cornell University Library](#))

**Somatic:** Relating to the body, especially as distinct from the mind. Our body often senses our discomfort before our brain registers it and by deepening our somatic awareness, we can be better prepared for the work of antiracism. We will check in on our individual somatic response(s) to the work of antiracism. We might ask questions like: “where and how in your body do you feel / are you experiencing sensation as we do this work / have this conversation?” (Maybe your shoulders tense up or your stomach feels upset, or perhaps your jaw is clenched tight or your knee is bouncing, etc).

**White Fragility:** A powerful range of reactions by White people (anger, fear, guilt, argumentation, silence) that work to reinstate our identities as good, moral people (paraphrased from Robin Diangelo's White Fragility)

**White Privilege or White Supremacy:** A racial hierarchy that places white people at the top and provides unfair advantage at the group level; Note: this is a social order that no one alive today created but that continues to benefit White people overall and it assumes that White peoples' interests and perspectives are ideal, universal and shared by everyone. (from [Robin Diangelo's Social Justice Cheat Sheet](#))

**White Solidarity or White Silence:** An unspoken agreement among White people to protect our advantage and not cause discomfort for racially problematic words or actions (paraphrased from Robin Diangelo's White Fragility).

**White Supremacy culture (or White Dominant culture):** The explicit to subtle ways that the norms, preferences and fears of white European descended people overwhelmingly shape how we: organize our work and institutions, see ourselves and others, interact with one another and with time, and make decisions. (For an in-depth discussion of this topic and a list of the characteristics of white dominant culture - as well as some suggested remedies or alternatives to the norm - check out Tema Okun's website: [White Supremacy Culture](#))

Key Definitions from Ibram X. Kendi's *The Antiracist Deck: 100 Meaningful Conversations on Power, Equity, and Justice*:

**Race:** A power construct of blended human difference that lives socially.

**Racist Idea:** Any idea suggesting that one racial group is inferior or superior to another racial group in any way.



**Antiracist Idea:** Any idea suggesting that the racial groups are equal in all their apparent differences.

**Racist (person):** One who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea.

**Antiracist (person):** One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea.

**Racial Inequity:** When two or more racial groups are not standing on a relatively equal footing.

**Racial Equity:** When two or more racial groups are standing on a relatively equal footing.

**Racist Policy:** Any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity among racial groups.

**Antiracist Policy:** Any measure that produces or sustains racial equity among racial groups.

**Racism:** Is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities.

**Antiracism:** A powerful collection of antiracist policies that leads to racial equity and is substantiated by antiracist ideas.

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Here are some terms/ideas that are intentionally *not defined*. We will use the coming year to discern their meaning for our church community:

**What would antiracism look like at MPUC?**

**What does it mean for MPUC to be an antiracist congregation?**

**What is the *hidden curriculum* at MPUC?**

**How does our Christian faith help us practice antiracism?**

# Grounding & Centering

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## The Role of Grounding & Centering Practices

A large part of our work in “embodied equity” revolves around body awareness. Grounding and centering practices give us the opportunity to be more aware of what is happening in our body, and to be more intentional in work that names and dismantles racism and white supremacy.

Grounding and centering practices can range from simple to more involve, and take 1-15 minutes. Our year of discernment work will involve grounding and centering at the beginning of discernment activities, and it is recommended that keepers of the space track whether a pause / “re-centering” is needed at any point in a given encounter.

Some benefits our Racial Justice Stewards have experienced from these practices are:

- Increased self-awareness and body awareness
- Increased capacity for moving in and through discomfort
- Reduced defensiveness
- Increased capacity for engaging in antiracism education and efforts
- Reduced harm toward BIPOC folks

It is also important to note that white folks increasing their skills in self awareness and body awareness might also increase safety and trust with BIPOC folks. This is because feelings without awareness have more potential to cause harm. Consistency with awareness can build trust.

## Somatics Examples

Because the concept of “somatics” is central to our Year-of-Discernment work, we’d like to provide some examples of somatics and awareness (or lack of awareness) as they relate to our behaviors. We recognize that *somatics*, *embodiment*, and *embodied equity* are likely new to some of our members. We hope these vignettes will allow you to recognize how self-awareness can serve antiracism efforts.

Here’s one relatable example: Have you ever been “hangry” - that feeling of being frustrated and then realizing that your frustration is more about needing to eat something than it is about the person or people with whom you are interacting? Somatic responses are similar in that our behavior may be connected to that feeling without our awareness.

## Stephanie's example:

My first encounter with my privilege as a white woman was in “Courageous Conversations” training through Saint Paul Public Schools. I was literally “knee-to-knee; toe-to-toe” with BIPOC colleagues, discussing their experiences with racism and white supremacy. I remember feeling tension in my throat and eye-brows. I remember feeling my gut drop when we did different exercises that demonstrated how many steps “ahead” I, as a white person, could be, due to a system that perpetuates racism and white supremacy. I remember tearfully reading a letter that for the first time named my own privilege. I remember how hard it was to get those words out.

I also remember, after reading Jen Harvey's Raising White Kids, feeling called to name race in the books I had purchased for my oldest child. I intentionally bought books that showed faces of children and families who weren't white, or straight, or from two-parent households. Harvey encouraged me to go deeper than simply allowing my child to observe these things, but to name them. I distinctly remember the first time I said, “this boy is *white.*” *I remember it because it felt uncomfortable. My stomach, face, and shoulders felt tight. I think I even winced. It was in that moment that I realized how much I bought into the idea of whiteness as default.*

## Lauren's Example:

I was talking with a friend about a class on intercultural learning that we were taking together. We were both excited about the material but as we talked, I started feeling uncomfortable and defensive. My stomach was unsettled, my jaw was clenching, and I started to get fidgety and not be able to sit still. After a few minutes of this, it occurred to me that in my friend's excitement about the material, she was talking in a raised voice and a tone of voice that would indicate confrontation in my cultural norm. Recognizing that my discomfort was about our differing communication styles rather than actual looming conflict, I was able to remain engaged in the conversation while also acknowledging my discomfort—we even talked about this difference together as an example of the content we were learning.

# Grounding and Centering Practice Examples

The following pages include helpful reminders and three examples of grounding and centering practices suitable to groups and facilitators with a wide range of experience and comfort with somatics.

***Three Breaths Grounding***

***Somatic Release Grounding***

***Arts-Based Grounding***

# Helpful Reminders

- There is not a singular or perfect way to lead a grounding and centering practice. Your groundedness and presence will help ground the group.
- It is okay to stay vague with suggestions for imagery or somatic awareness / release; it is also okay to get specific
- Different practices will serve people in different ways. The goal is not necessarily comfort; rather, awareness without judgment. All experiences are valuable to the practice of engagement around racial justice.
- Use inclusive language, for example:
  - ◇ *“Notice how your body connects to the earth” vs. “feel your feet on the floor”*
  - ◇ *Make a best-effort to pronounce names and places connected to BIPOC experiences correctly*
  - ◇ *Be intentional about pronoun use. If you don’t know what pronouns to use ask.*
  - ◇ *If you make a mistake, apologize or say “thank you,” and move on. Take care not to make the mistake again.*

## Three Breaths Grounding

1. Invite participants to notice how their bodies are connected to the earth; offer the options to close eyes or gaze down gently.
2. Invite participants to take three breaths together. If desired, expand on these concepts as it might relate to the experience or group you are working with.
3. The first breath is a breath for self.
4. The second breath is a breath for the people in the physical and/or virtual space.
5. The third breath is for the larger community (E.g., Land, Neighborhood, City, State, etc.)
6. Invite participants to bring themselves back to the virtual or physical space, and begin the work they're set to do with care.



# Somatic Release Grounding

Invite participants to notice how their body is connected to the earth, and get comfortable.

Let participants know that you'll walk them through a series of six somatic release exercises, five times each. Some may serve them, and some may not. Invite them to experience the exercises without judgement of themselves. Notify participants they may yawn, and that is okay. Encourage participants to listen to their bodies, and disengage if an exercise is causing pain.

1. Eyebrows Raise and Release x5
  - (E.g., *“Raise your eyebrows up as if you are surprised, then release. We will do that 4 more times.”*)
2. Jaw / Tongue Release x5
  - (E.g., *“open your mouth and gently move your jaw from side to side. Notice where your tongue is, and release it from the roof of your mouth if it is there. Now close your mouth gently. We will do that 4 more times”*)
3. Shoulders Raise and Release x5
  - (E.g., *“Raise your shoulders up to a place that’s comfortable, now bring them back and down. We will do that 4 more times”*)
4. Neck Stretches (x1-3)
  - (e.g., *“move your right ear toward your right shoulder and take three breaths. Now bring your head to center, and move your left ear toward your left shoulder ... chin down, breathe .... Chin up, breathe.”*)

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...Somatics Release Grounding continued

5. Stomach Squeeze and Release x5
  - (e.g., “squeeze your stomach for 5-4-3-2-1, and release. We will do that four more times.”)
6. Hands Squeeze x5
  - (e.g., “squeeze your hands for 5-4-3-2-1, and release. We will do that four more times.”)

Invite participants to move their bodies however they need in order to slowly return to the space with the group. Give time, waiting until all participants appear (or affirm they are) ready to move forward.

## Arts-Based Grounding

Choose a piece of music to listen to, a poem to read, or a piece of art to display as people enter the space. As people enter, this artwork can be something they are aware of or something that is in the background of their awareness.

When you begin the session, call attention to the piece of art by listening to the piece of music again as a group, reading the poem aloud, observing the piece of art, etc. and offer a moment of intentional reflection.

### Reflection Options:

- Listen or observe again together with intention, leaving space for silence. (You do not need to ask people to talk about it, the silence is the opportunity for grounding.)
- Listen or observe again together with intention and provide a moment for reflection, asking: “what did you notice in your body?”

# Reflection & Awareness

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## The Role of Reflection & Awareness

Reflection and awareness plays an essential role in racial justice work. Reflection and awareness allows us to pause, bring awareness to our bodies, and connect to the racialized experiences of people who are and are not in the room with us.

Some benefits Racial Justice Stewards have experienced as a result of reflection and awareness are:

- Increased self awareness: *body awareness, thought awareness, action awareness (past and present)*
- Reduced defensiveness (E.g., *“I’m noticing my jaw is clenched.”*)
- Increased sociocultural awareness
- Reduced intellectualizing. *Intellectualizing can serve as a defense mechanism to avoid discomfort. Reflection and awareness brings us back to “embodied equity.” Reflection and awareness acknowledges the very real role of the body in experiencing race.*
- Increased empathy, compassion, and action with intention
- Increased capacity for moving in and through discomfort
- Increased capacity for engaging in antiracism education and efforts
- Reduced harm toward BIPOC folks

It is also important to note that White folks increasing their skills in self awareness and body awareness might also increase safety and trust with BIPOC folks. This is because feelings without awareness have more potential to cause harm. Consistency with awareness can build trust.

## Reflection & Awareness Questions

- What is coming up for (you/me/us) right now? How does that feel in the body?
- I am noticing \_\_\_\_\_ (ex. a lot of crossed arms/legs, tension in the room, tears, etc.). Would someone be willing to share what's happening for you right now?
- I want to acknowledge the feelings you/we are experiencing. (Could move into opportunity to share, a grounding and centering practice, or a moment of silence)
- If \_\_\_\_\_ is coming up for (you/me/us), how might we use that to connect to the experiences of Black, Brown and Indigenous people, or people historically marginalized due to race?
- How has racism and white supremacy contributed to the issue or problem we are engaging with?
- Who is in the room; and who is not in the room? What might this mean for us?
- What is the history of minoritization / marginalization of the person / people who are and are not in the room with us?
- What role does race play in the interactions I might have in this context?
- Considering these things, how might I consider “showing up” in this space?
- What does this mean for me as I consider future action with intention?



Do you have questions or comments about any of the content included in this resource guide? Please reach out to anyone on our RJS Coordinating team.

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