

Redemptive Rehearsals: Communities of Practice among black and white Christians with a concern for racial justice.

Research Report, August 2023

Natalie Chen & Anna Ruddick

In this project we have experimented with the use of online Communities of Practice as a tool for black and white¹ Christians to explore experiences and questions of racism and White privilege. We hoped to practice a model of shared learning which could support participants in their journeys towards equity in their inner lives and the different contexts in which they play a part.

Both the process of conducting this research and the data gathered through the Communities of Practice themselves have been instructive. This report seeks to offer an accessible account of the research, our learnings, and our recommendations. It became apparent in the analysis stage that the work suggested a broader range of outputs than a single research report. To offer a richer resource for others seeking to engage in intercultural conversations we have developed two other resources that sit alongside this report: *Stepping Stones towards Racial Justice for black and white Christians*, and *Intercultural Communities of Practice - a Facilitators' Guide*.

Stepping Stones towards Racial Justice for black and white Christians

Reflecting on the conversations during the Communities of Practice, and with our group members afterwards has led us to consider metaphors for the process of increasing awareness of and living in the light of systemic racism and efforts toward racial equity. In this piece we have used the idea of stepping stones to name the stages, phases or significant turning points in an individual's own process, so as to highlight commonalities, whilst being aware of the complexities of each person's life experience and therefore relationship to systemic racism.

Intercultural Communities of Practice - a Facilitators' Guide

While the initial focus of our research was on the experiences of participants, as is often the case, much was learned as an organising and facilitation team. We acknowledge that we will not be the only people doing these things and that this was our first foray into the process. However, we share in the facilitators' guide some of the learnings from our experience of hosting online Communities of Practice on this topic. We hope that this will resonate with others and be a practical and accessible tool for those seeking to engage in this work in their own settings.

¹ A note on capitalisation: We are aware of the different approaches taken by authors to intentionally capitalising, or not, Black and White. We have chosen to capitalise 'Black' or 'White' when we are referring to Blackness or Whiteness as political, social and cultural realities and to use lowercase 'black' and 'white' when describing specific people such as our participants.

This research covered two Communities of Practice, at the time of writing a third group is underway. Each group has been different in many respects and the process of repeatedly facilitating these Communities of Practice has also been a rich opportunity for personal and professional growth for us as a team. While we offer our story so far in this report and its accompanying resources there is a sense that this is a beginning rather than an end. Our research found that what happened between black and white Christians during the CoP process was a *redemptive rehearsal*. We use this phrase to describe the way that groups offered a microcosm of building relationships, making ourselves vulnerable, growing in self-awareness and empathy for others and talking about our lives, our beliefs and our blindneses. Within our Communities of Practice groups participants were able to engage in these processes in a held and accountable space which enabled them to acknowledge and move forward in their personal journeys, gaining confidence and hope for bringing a greater awareness of racial justice into their own daily lives and spheres of influence.

This report begins with a brief orientation of our theoretical frameworks and the practical expressions of them to date in the work of Urban Life. We then give an account of the research process including some reflection on our organisational learnings. The substantive element of the report is given to analysis of our qualitative data, offering a window into the CoP group conversations and the conclusion/implications that they suggest. We then reflect on the work in the light of Lartey's categories of post-colonial practices and interculturality before offering a final summary of our recommendations and conclusions for the Black Light course and other similar programmes, for formal theological education, for church communities and for those involved in intercultural conversations on racial justice.

This research has been a beginning for Urban Life in using and developing our expertise in this form of work, and a beginning in that it demonstrates such a depth of need for vulnerable and accountable intercultural conversation. Perhaps particularly, as our recommendations show, in the spheres of Christian ministry and theological education. Our aspiration in this work is that we can make a small contribution to seeing more of this happen.

Starting points in theory and practice

In recent decades significant progress has been made in understanding the relative nature of classical theology as White, Western, and male. A diversity of theologians, including those from the majority world, have demonstrated the rich voices that can emerge from alternative standpoints, and Practical Theology has offered a methodology which includes a further owning of our positionality in theological writing and research. The racialised injustice of the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with widespread Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in 2020 have proved catalytic, bringing to the fore a wider concern particularly for racial justice. This necessitates spaces in which Black and White Christians can share, learn and struggle together to see afresh their religious and theological traditions in the light of Christendom, colonialism, and the

influence of White privilege on British theological imaginations. One response among denominational bodies and TEIs is investing in forms of unconscious bias and anti-racism training. The Black Light course² is an alternative approach. A partnership between Urban Expression and the Ascension Trust and originally developed in the 1990s, it was relaunched in 2021 as an open access programme delivered online over eight evening sessions and advertised to a wide, ecumenical constituency. It aims to offer black and white Christians the opportunity to explore their faith and our contemporary context in the light of systemic racism. It covers:

- The Black presence in the Bible and church history
- The experience of Black communities in the UK
- Reverse mission and multicultural church
- Engaging with racism in church and society
- Black and White in partnership

Training courses which expose gaps in our understanding, inform and enable mutual appreciation are vital to the broader picture. However, to translate the new insights gained in training into the whole of life and ministry there is a need for space to do the difficult work of critical self-awareness. Fundamentally this can be understood as learning how to learn from those who we perceive as ‘other’.

In Urban Life’s work alongside those working in marginal contexts we have developed a form of theological accompaniment which offers mission practitioners an ongoing, iterative process of learning, action, and response. Communities of Practice (CoPs) are “Groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Characterised by a shared ‘domain’ (or field of interest), a relational bond developed together, and the impact of their reflections on their practice, Communities of Practice offer a mutual and collaborative model for ongoing development in a specific area. Having piloted an online Community of Practice for mission practitioners during the UK lockdowns in 2021, in this project we aimed to explore the potential for this model to enable the integration of insight relating to racism and diversity into the habits of daily life and work.

In shaping our approach, we drew together Emmanuel Lartey’s concept of ‘post-colonial practices’ and the use of Communities of Practice in theological education and formation. Lartey’s work addresses the need for African continental and diasporan communities to rid themselves of the strictures of colonialism in their own theology and practice. In this context he defines post-colonial practices as those which are subversive, strategic (in that they involve ‘action-for-change’), involve people as reflective practitioners, are hybrid and plural, are deeply relational, dynamic, poly-vocal, and creative (Lartey, 2013. xvi-xxii). Ours is a British, intercultural, and Christian context in which historic colonialism remains

² www.blacklightcourse.uk

embedded in the thought and practice of both white and black people in different ways. Lartey's definition of post-colonial practices is therefore helpful in our context. It is also deeply resonant with our approach to theological accompaniment, in which we prioritise mutuality, facilitating as learners not as experts, and challenging inherited assumptions and privileges. The Community of Practice is a well-established model in many fields of expertise. Jennifer Courduff highlights the synergy between Communities of Practice in her field of education and Christian community and formation. She emphasises the 'compassionate' potential of CoPs to become sites of 'radical inclusivity' (2018. 335). Taylor and Dewerse are further experimenting with CoPs as a model for theological education, recognising the importance of learning which engages the whole person, and which is situated in community and in participants' own practice (2020. 402-8).

These two threads, that of post-colonial action and of CoPs in theological education, are combined in this project to experiment with learning models which might help both local churches and theological education institutions (TEIs) to respond to the need for both broad and deep engagement in global theologies and issues of racial justice. By aligning a Community of Practice model with post-colonial awareness in theological accompaniment we aimed to create a way for participants to learn from those who are different to themselves; to learn for the whole of life, embedded in the practices of life and ministry; and to cultivate habits of critical self-awareness and reflection which can promote a lived commitment to racial justice, ongoing reflective practice and life-long learning. While our approach was shaped by Lartey's post-colonial practices, what occurred more commonly through these groups was intercultural conversation. During the sessions we glimpsed moments of post-colonial freedom but, starting where people were at in most cases meant exploring together what we might mean by colonialism and post-colonialism and their implications. Therefore, in considering what we have achieved in this project we draw on Lartey's work on interculturality as a lens through which to view our experiences and recommendations.

Methodology

Over a period of one year, we offered two Communities of Practice to two consecutive cohorts of participants in the Black Light course. Each community of practice ran for 4 monthly sessions during Autumn – Winter 2021-22 (group 1) and Spring – Summer 2022 (group 2). We hoped for ethnically diverse groups of participants drawn from different fields of life and ministry. However, participation was self-selected among those who had enjoyed doing the Black Light course and who wanted to reflect on the content further with others (Mason, 2002. 134). As such we had limited control over the diversity in the groups, with the first one being majority white and the second majority black. Most participants were involved in church leadership in some form, including bi-vocationally, highlighting the importance of this work for ministerial training programmes.

Our research questions in starting this project were:

Can a Community of Practice support people to change their ways of living and working in response to issues of race and diversity?

How can online groups create and sustain relationships which facilitate reflective practice?

Initially Urban Life's facilitation team was all white, and a part of our interest in this work was to help us diversify our delivery team and to learn and grow as individuals and as an organisation in this area. To this end we invited two experienced facilitators who are black and who had been involved in the Black Light course to join us in co-facilitating these Communities of Practice. This enabled the sessions to be co-facilitated by one black and one white facilitator working together.

The process of drawing new facilitators into our existing model of Community of Practice, albeit with this new focus on racial justice, was instructive, and costly, particularly for our black facilitators. I (Anna) acknowledge that while we aspired to co-create this project from the start, in reality an all-white planning group and all-white organisation (Urban Life) initiated it. This clearly risked disadvantaging the black facilitators that we invited in, and to our shame it took their courageous honesty and some time for us to recognise this. Having developed a distinctive way of facilitating CoPs instinctively rather than clearly articulating it, we failed to offer new facilitators adequate training. Simon (co-facilitator for the first group) got stuck in and learnt along the way, which was clearly more difficult and vulnerable for him than if he had had prior training. Natalie requested to participate in the first CoP group before agreeing to facilitate the second. Her wisdom, and honesty in raising our awareness of the racial dynamics at work in this situation both protected her and enabled us to learn and change. This experience has forced us to acknowledge and articulate more explicitly our approach to facilitation and to recognise the ways in which black people are continually marginalised by such oblivious practices as late recruiting of minorities to a project and making assumptions that they will assimilate to White Western ways of working quickly and on the job. This means that minority team members have to work harder and perform to a higher standard than white team members. We lament this and the cost of it, particularly in this instance, to our friends and co-facilitators.

We have learnt then that training for facilitators is a vital aspect of hosting this kind of space; and that a new facilitator having the opportunity to experience the model as a participant and reflect on it with other facilitators is an effective way for training to take place. In this context of diverse facilitation teams' co-facilitation is in itself an intercultural experience and can model the kinds of communication and engagement that we hope to foster in the group itself. The learnings relating to this have been central to the success of the groups, hence our decision to produce, as a diverse writing team, a Facilitators Guide as a significant output from this project.

In keeping with the ethos of this project our aim was to collaborate with group members in shaping the nature of this research. I (Anna) was the named 'researcher' and joined both CoP groups as a participant-observer (McCormack Steinmetz., 1991 42-54). We introduced the nature of the research by email to participants along with a consent form before the

sessions started. We then repeated this in the first session of each group and invited them to offer suggestions for how the research process might develop. Perhaps due to the already intense conversation we were engaging in, perhaps due to having only four sessions together, participants did not offer any particular suggestions for the research process. A reflection on the whole process, including this aspect, is that more time and work could have been given to set up the groups and the research process to maximise the potential for co-creativity. As a participant-observer I (Anna) engaged with the sessions where possible while also observing the process and reflecting on it in the light of the research questions. I found a rhythm of typing up reflections after each session which we then offered to group members for comment, and this was the primary way in which I checked my observations. After the first couple of sessions of the first group we found that using the reflections from the previous gathering as a starting point for reflection gave continuity to the conversation and an opportunity for participants to steer it. The groups used this space to edit my insights and offer their own perspectives in response, constituting a feedback loop for the research reflections and a degree of co-creation in the findings. We also invited participants to complete an online survey at the end of the CoP and conducted follow up calls with them after approximately 2-3 months to hear their perspectives given the passing of time. Our reflection on participant's journeys was sent as a draft to group members for their comment and to check our analysis.

The feedback loop created as I (Anna) sent my notes on a session to the group members was an important methodological learning for me. I recall distinct moments of shock on occasions where a black group member heard my notes (written as a white woman) in a vastly different way than I had intended. The experience of notetaking in this context, with its inevitable editing and shorthand, demonstrated very clearly the power and privilege of holding the pen (Strhan, 2015. 23). My growing awareness and unease about this, coupled with the skilled and insightful investment in the group process by our co-facilitators meant that as I approached data analysis it felt important to expand the research team to ensure the work reached its full potential.

Together, Natalie Chen and I have analysed and reflected on the data collected and our experiences of the group sessions, including their impact on each of us personally. Writing up this project as an intercultural piece of work has enriched it hugely. Clearly it is limited in terms of scale, and the 'learning through the process' on the part of Urban Life brought its own weaknesses; nonetheless it is, in part, an authentic account of a historically all-white organisation seeking to respond to its developing awareness of its own Whiteness and to contribute to anti-racist work. We (Natalie and Anna) present this journey, alongside the insights gained through our Communities of Practice themselves, owned and experienced by each of us in our distinct ways. Naming and taking responsibility for racist attitudes (however subtle or unconscious) and the harm that they do to black people is difficult for white people to do (see DiAngelo's helpful work on White Fragility, 2018). But it is essential for us to build racial equity, which, as we see it, is a coming of the kingdom.

Analysis: Redemptive Rehearsals in Intercultural Conversation

The Black Light course was a catalyst for rich and deep conversations which were developed and facilitated through the Community of Practice process that followed. While the course content, format and approach provided the context for *this* piece of research, we recognise the starting points of *experience, learning and reflection, and questions* as entry points for anyone with an interest in doing this work. There are three emerging themes that form a framework for our analysis and which we hope will be helpful for others in differing contexts:

1. Curriculum and Content – The pedagogical power of theological institutions and local churches and the role they play in racial justice and injustice.
2. Conversations and Relationships – The desire for and requirements of honest discussion that begin to form relationships across difference.
3. Care and Compassion – The sensitivity and support needed to sustain people who commit to the on-going work of racial justice.

Intercultural conversations in Christian contexts which include reflections on Whiteness and white supremacy will involve an engagement with these elements. Colonialism, or more accurately the need for decolonisation has been a consistent thread throughout our conversations. By colonialism we mean both the historical reality of dominated land and peoples, and its residual contemporary expression in the continued exploitation of black people by white people for their skills, resources, and wisdom. This based on a false claim to an inherent white supremacy. (Hopkins 2012, 3-7; Gerbner 2018, 84-90) Our themes could also be expressed as efforts to decolonise theological education, our Christian communities and ourselves. Through the Communities of Practice, we have engaged in intercultural conversation, and at their best they have created moments in which we have seen our colonisation more clearly in one or more of these spheres and/or have begun to shed it, finding ways to think, speak and act differently together. Some of our findings on these themes are as follows.

Curriculum and content

In the first session each Community of Practice group reflected on their experiences of the Black Light course. All participants, both black and white, heard new information and new perspectives within the course which took us immediately into conversation about theological education. Both black and white participants worshiped regularly, most in a majority church context. The majority had also studied at theological institutions and were involved in church leadership in various forms. As a result of their experiences our conversation grappled with the portrayal of race within formal theological education and informal learning in church and devotional life through preaching, teaching, reading and worship.

Sessions on Black presence in the Bible and the role of black people within church history offered counter-narratives to a 'Whitewashed' Christianity and participants responded with a spectrum of strong emotions from shock and sadness to anger and a sense of betrayal:

'How has this happened?'

'Why didn't I ask these questions when I was being taught?'

'I didn't join the dots.'

Groups articulated a sense that significant contextual knowledge is 'hidden in plain sight' within theological education and within church life. One participant phrased it as *'known but not celebrated'*. This hiddenness or omission from curriculums within theological institutions has led to an absence from teaching in churches, resulting in prejudice in the theological imaginations of the majority of Western Christians, both black and white.

From this starting point group members began to recognise the long legacy of colonialism and the extent to which Whiteness is embedded within British society *and* the UK church. Identifying together the power of subtle omissions and the difference that explicit emphasis and contextual reference can make to the reading of scripture and history was profound. Confronting the need to decolonise our churches and theological institutions, group members began to talk about power. Reflections that developed across the life of each group included significant (not always easy) conversations about who has power and to what degree we are all able to act.

Black participant: *'Giving power away has to be part of using it well. The struggle will always be to give up power.'*

White participant: *'and with no strings attached.'*

The group lamented just how rare it is for white people to lay down their power for black people, and yet how central this is to the Gospel: *'that's what's needed but that's radical'*.

Given participants' roles within their churches, questions of how to use our personal influence to effect change encompassed the nature of leadership. Group members asked: How do those who have power, freshly aware that their power is a *'consequence of history and an accident of birth'* use it to serve the cause of justice. We discussed what 'postures' might serve the cause of justice and articulated together a vision for intercultural church life in which services and activities include varied voices, leadership is more collaborative and egalitarian, and there is a consistent willingness to ask ourselves: Who's voice is missing here, and why? How do we hear from them? In the follow up interviews a few months after the groups finished we asked white participants whether they felt themselves more likely to deliberately lay down their power (perhaps an opportunity or position) to make room for a black person. One white participant summed up the experience expressed by others in their response:

'...I'm more aware of that as an issue now, previously I would have thought of making room for a younger person for example but wouldn't have thought of it in terms of race before, so yes I'm more likely to do it.'

Key findings and implications

Part of the experience of the CoP groups was the differing reactions between black and white participants which highlighted their differing relationship to issues of race and white supremacy. For me as a white person (Anna) this was one of the most significant parts of the process. It embodied a fact of systemic racism: that some people's experience of the world is not the same as other people's experience of the world. Through a lack of exposure to difference, and the skilled, but costly, code-switching of black people, it is possible for a white person to remain largely unaware of the daily reality of racism. Beginning any process of addressing white supremacy must begin with unpicking this obliviousness. A reflection on the groups overall was that the white participants started the process further back than we had anticipated, as demonstrated by a sense of having knowledge in theory but being oblivious to the reality of the experiences of black people. I (Natalie) noted that white participants remained in the shock stage as the process continued. With this in mind we offer these implications of our research for formal and informal theological education.

- **Racial justice is central to the message of the gospel.**

Firstly, any theological learning needs to start with a conviction that racial justice is central to the message of the gospel. Given Jesus' emphasis on '...loving your neighbour as yourself' (Matt 22:39), and the racially challenging picture of our 'neighbour' he offers in the story of the good Samaritan this would seem to be self-evident. However, racial justice, and other social justice concerns are often in danger of being considered 'niche' within the church. Equally, special interest modules and courses within theological education set such issues apart from the 'core' of mandatory theological training. This perpetuates injustice, specifically the injustice of white supremacy. Unpacking what the words of Jesus mean in the light of racial justice we believe is a fundamental part of preaching and practicing the gospel. To neglect this leaves black individuals burdened with the task of redeeming and relearning the 'good news' they have received to contextualise God's love as a liberating force within a racist society. This imperative was implicit but not explicit in the Black Light course content and we feel it needs to be prioritised as core teaching on the course and in theological training within institutions and churches.

- **Reviewing 'core' material in theological institution curriculums.**

We appreciate that much is already being done within the Common Awards network to foreground racial justice and address White, Western and Male bias within theological literature. As part of this decolonising process theological institutions could look again at what is being taught as core material, and how it is being presented. Which voices and perspectives are being emphasised within the teaching and literature? Are ideologies being universalised as a consequence of this? Where a Eurocentric emphasis has been identified, consider whether what has been labelled classical theology should be renamed European theology. Alongside this, providing comparable space and resource for Majority world theology would enable an equal and balanced perspective of theology across courses within theological institutions.

In addition to diversifying theological literature, colleges could attend to the different theological methodologies and epistemologies offered by Majority World

theologians. There is not only a richness of theological ideas but also a diversity of approaches to theological knowledge which can aid the formation of students as rounded humans and equip them for ministry in diverse communities.

This is important work and, in time will yield benefits. Our learning in this process is that while offering new information is vital it generally acts as a catalyst for individuals to critically address their own personal and community relationship to Whiteness. It is this *reflective* work which is vital to human formation, and which should be prioritised as a part of ministerial formation at all levels. One possibility to this end could be a mandatory 'Introduction to Normativity and Difference' element as a part of all ministerial formation programmes. Such an inclusion could help participants identify their own standpoints and privileges and set in motion a reflective process which can be supported throughout their training and beyond through peer groups, perhaps following the Community of Practice model we have offered here.

- **Diversity of voice and hermeneutical perspective in church life.**

For black participants the bible was a mixed blessing. While group members acknowledged the significance of scripture to their formation, they also voiced a sense of betrayal in learning from the Black Light course the ways in which the bible had been used by white slave-owners and missionaries to justify and perpetuate the status quo of slavery and white domination. As one participant put it:

'Recognising how some of us have been marginalised from the translation.' *'It caused me to ask what is this that I have believed!'*

To redeem scripture from a history of use in support of white supremacy contextual readings of the bible and church history must become common place in church life. Those in ministry roles need to be skilled in selecting and teaching from hermeneutical lenses akin to the experiences and cultural backgrounds of communities in which they live and serve. Equally, de-centring the 'expert preacher' in favour of hearing the wisdom from one another can open intercultural conversation. Learning to set aside one's own cultural readings and receive from scripture from other, and multiple, perspectives ensures that the gospel is offered as 'good news' for all.

Conversations and Relationships

"[We need to] open up spaces for people to speak about the uncomfortable in comfortable spaces" Kelly Brown Douglas

The opportunity created by the Black Light course was to hear about racial justice within a Christian context and explore the issues raised by the material in conversation with other Christians. While it offered the potential for new relationships, Community of Practice participants felt that the wealth and depth of content provided didn't allow adequate time for reflection or deep thinking in break-out rooms. Space to come back to the material in

the Community of Practice enabled participants to consider their emotions and thoughts about what they had heard in the light of their experience and practice.

There was an acknowledgment that group members were coming to the conversation from different places and that showing consideration for one another was a part of learning together. As one white participant said:

'I did it out of interest and a good thing to stretch me... ...for others particularly the black women involved it was more personal.'

Another white participant described their hope to *'hear people's opinions who have different experiences'* A black participant sought *'space not to be judged but to be heard, where experiences are heard and valued'*. Groups recognised that *'at some point it's going to get uncomfortable and that's ok', 'awkwardness is a response that we have to learn from'*.

The community of practice facilitated contact with others wanting to explore issues around racial justice but more importantly it offered the possibility of connection with people of difference. This was a greater blessing for white participants than black, as many white participants acknowledged they didn't have anyone to have intercultural conversations with and therefore valued the opportunity CoP provided. This lack of opportunity was either because they didn't have many (or in some cases any!) relationships with people of different ethnicities or that the relationships they did have were not deep enough to overcome their uncertainty or lack of confidence about how to open conversations about racial justice. Some black participants expressed feeling that their personal journey of becoming aware of the impact of white supremacy on their lives and in their faith, (which, as we have seen, for many included strong emotions, anger, and a need for healing) was not a part of the conversation in their contexts. Many also had had little opportunity to talk safely or helpfully with white people about issues of racial justice. Taking intentional steps to create bridges for personal relationships is a conclusion and practice that white participants needed to come to for themselves. As one put it, *'In my recent experience of working with black-led church leaders I have been really taking care to listen and see them as brothers in Christ, trying to understand where they are coming from...'*

Intercultural conversation which leads to intercultural relationship is, we believe, one of the keys to transformation that enables racial justice. In one exchange, a black facilitator asked the white males in the group: *'what is helpful and encouraging to hear from a black person? Or is it all just "Argh must do better!"?' A white participant responded that '...realising more of my privilege has been life-giving – more awake, conscious...'* which surprised the black facilitator and led to further discussion of coming to awareness of power. Another white participant commented on the discomfort which comes from realising that their power as a White person is due to the unjust social constructions of race. Having begun to name privilege and power the group went on to ask, *'how do you pass power on?' They went on to make connections with Jesus' example of laying down power as a response to recognised privilege. Such moments demonstrate the way in which reflective conversation in intercultural space can be a powerful source of learning.*

Participants related to this conversational space differently. As diverse and geographically dispersed groups the Communities of Practice met via Zoom which created a particular dynamic. A Zoom room is in some ways intimate. We glimpsed each other's homes and often arrived more informally than if we had all gone out to a public venue, as a result it afforded us an insight into each other's lives. However, it was also a distinct space, separate from the daily lives of participants and with only a limited opportunity to get to know one another. Some group members found this particularly challenging:

I would have much preferred face to face, ...to get to know people, go for a meal first then conversation you know. ... I wanted to contribute but zoom, and others a bit shy, so group dynamics a bit stilted overall. ...everyone was trying to make it work but I don't know...

Others seemed to value the uniqueness of the space as creating a held, safe-er space in which to voice and process more difficult feelings and grapple with new thoughts:

'I came to these conversations with many questions and possibly at the point of throwing out the baby with the bathwater [referring to Christianity] ... This Community of Practice has been pivotal to where I was going and how God was using me...' Later this participant continued: 'I'm committed to my role however small because I'm part of a bigger solution.'

Again, black and white participants found they engaged in the space differently. White participants who did not have existing close relationships with black people were hoping for connections which could last:

'[I'm] really interested in the ongoing journey, checking in with where you are to make sure you're not moving off course and I haven't really got a group that I can do that with.'

Black participants were generally less inclined to forge lasting connections, instead finding the space important, if painful at times. They articulated the difficulty and pain involved in naming and processing the impact of systemic racism in their own lives and the healing brought about by hearing white people acknowledge their privilege and commit to take steps to live more justly:

'[Hearing others] naming privilege is encouraging to me because it's acknowledging partiality, it sounds like humility.'

Listening and being listened to across difference was important for both black and white participants in different ways. Black participants were very aware of cultural perspectives and practices other than their own, expressing the pain and complexities of needing to navigate a dominant culture. This was enlightening particularly for white participants, raising their critical self-awareness, and provoking challenging reflection about their own position, power, and complicity in white supremacy. For some black participants healing occurred in the process as they were deeply heard by white people and received respect, care, and repentance. The willingness of white participants to name their Whiteness and to take actions in their own lives however small was often surprising to black participants and was welcomed as encouragement that systemic racism can be challenged, and that God is at work within some white Christians bringing change. For most white participants, listening and being listened to led to a sense of connection with black group members, which in turn

added insight and a stronger commitment to eradicate racism from their own thoughts, words, and daily living.

The nature of the Communities of Practice, running for only 4 monthly sessions online, meant that creating ongoing relationships was generally not possible. Equally the healing interchanges between black and white participants felt like small, if significant, drops in the ocean. Nevertheless, creating time, space and facilitation for such conversations was an important part of the transformative process in that it was a *rehearsal space*. The CoP sessions were both significant in themselves but also a way for both black and white participants to gain confidence in talking with one another about race. One white participant at the start of the process described her '*nervousness*' about being '*naïve white middle class*', and in her follow up interview after the CoP had finished reflected: '*I no longer assume that someone's story is the same as mine... realised still coming from an imperial mentality, the more I notice it, things I've always taken for granted, really interesting. Just double thinking, double watching, stepping back a bit.*'

My (Anna) observation is that for white participants, myself included, finding language and getting comfortable with speaking out loud about our white privilege, Whiteness and the pervasiveness of white supremacy in our society and its impact on our thinking has been a central function of the CoP groups. Some white participants were more comfortable with this than others, but being in an environment where these things were named and owned with repentance in conversation with black participants enabled us to find courage to take action to resist racism rather than being overcome by shame or uncertainty.

For both black and white participants the groups offered the chance for simple human connection, person to person. One white participant described a chat with a black participant during the break time as '*a precious moment... a human moment*', reflecting later he said: '*informal conversation in the break [was] almost the highlight for me, a personal contact amidst the heavy stuff, cold water on a hot day.*' He recognised the significance of such interactions, gentle, informal and about the shared humanity of each person. These, just as much as the more intentional conversation, formed a part of the richness of the CoP, connecting across difference as persons, humans made in God's image.

Key findings & implications

- **A conversational space is a necessary accompaniment to content-led racial justice courses.**

For our participants the Community of Practice was an important part of their participation in the Black Light course.

'It's [the CoP] improved my experience of the course and the soaking in of it... it's helped me to get the most of the Black Light course and helped me to use what I've learnt.'

Therefore, we conclude that offering a CoP is a necessary second part of the Black Light course to support transformative practice and achieve the desired outcomes. Clearly this also involves resourcing and publicising the CoP in a way that enables participants to access it as the second part of their learning and transformative process. As discussed above, those who chose to join the Communities of Practice

were those who felt both they wanted further reflection time and/or that they did not have other relationships in which they could explore racial justice further. The implication of our research is that a CoP group may provide a needed space for people in this situation while others may not need it or may not be ready, either through life circumstances or self-awareness, to enter a deeper process of critical reflection.

- **Intercultural conversations can only start from where participants are.**

It was our aspiration for the CoP groups to be spaces where people would share and grow in the living out of racial justice in their own lives. Our focus was on changing practices. While this happened to some extent, the reality of the starting point of particularly our white participants meant that more conversational work was needed. This led us to reflect on steps in the journeys of both black and white people in relation to racial justice. For black people the path includes reclaiming our voice, shining light on the extent of white supremacy, and developing a post-colonial consciousness which decolonises our inherited faith and social structures. For white people the journey involves: understanding systemic racism so as to overcome white fragility, realising the impact of white privilege, and connecting theology to white supremacy in order for the decolonising process to begin. We have written more on this in our reflection: *Stepping Stones towards Racial Justice for black and white Christians*, and it has been helpful for us to acknowledge the need to welcome the unique starting points of each participant as well as the common stepping stones on a journey which is inevitably incremental and often not linear. Groups at times felt overwhelmed by the complexity of our current context in which Whiteness is largely unacknowledged while continuing to wield the power of white supremacy right across Western social, political, cultural, economic, and theological worlds.

- **Intercultural conversations need careful framing and facilitation by those already on the journey themselves to hold participants in the vulnerability required.**

A part of our approach to Community of Practice conversations has been to invite participants to share in the responsibility for making the space accessible and helpful for us all. The security of the vessel determines the safety of the journey and the arrival at a place of transformation. Discussions of 'ground rules' at the start of each group involved naming the ways we want to talk and listen to one another, the things we might find helpful or not helpful in this. This too highlighted cultural difference with white participants generally offering 'not interrupting one another' as helpful, while some black participants described the natural flow of interjection in conversation which is more familiar to them. This raised the question of whether the CoP is black space or white space and how we might find an intercultural space together in which all find some familiarity at times, but all find some strangeness at times too. In naming this as an aspiration we sought to work together to enable it, facilitators played a key role in reminding the groups of our commitments to one another at the beginning of each session and at moments within the conversations if things seemed to be going off track. Groups were facilitated by two experienced

facilitators, one black and one white. A further value of our CoP approach is that facilitators are not present as ‘experts’ but as ‘fellow travellers’ who both facilitate and participate in the conversation hosting themselves as well as the space with care and awareness. The opportunity for vulnerability and willingness to share bravely and honestly needs to be built intentionally and relationally during each CoP session. In part this is modelled by the facilitators who are both aware of their own journey in racial justice and able to offer guideposts for others in theirs. For more on this see our *Intercultural Communities of Practice – A Facilitators Guide*.

- **The purpose of intercultural conversation is connection across difference, person to person.**

The conversational space created by the Community of Practice fulfilled its purpose in the humanising moments between participants. They saw themselves and one another as people made in God’s image, more deeply aware of their experiences of privilege and prejudice. As a result, the urgency of the call to racial justice became more vivid and more hopeful. The groups offered the opportunity not just for connection in themselves but for *redemptive rehearsals*, in which participants gained confidence to build person-to-person relationships with people of difference and articulate together their hope for racial justice in their worlds.

Care and Compassion

Racial Injustice has caused pain and death to black people for centuries. The traumatic events of 2020 and the BLM protests that followed centralised black voices and stories that have previously been marginalised. This brought new awareness to some white Christians who responded by prioritising conversations about racial justice as an initial knee-jerk reaction. The Black Light course offers a space for deeper learning, foregrounding the voices (perspectives, expertise, and experience) of mainly black theologians and practitioners articulating the cause and effect and the history of the current crisis. It aims to prophetically raise questions and point the way forward for people wanting to do the work of racial justice as a Christian responsibility.

Having completed the course, both black and white participants arrived at the Community of Practice with varied experiences and perspectives. Some black participants were weary, cautious of giving themselves to conversations about racial justice that might evaporate as the cultural mood moves on. Others experienced significant personal pain and mental health challenges because of the racism they endure. Their presence in the groups was a risk to them in a way that it wasn’t for white participants, and I (Anna) deeply respect their openness and courage in participating. Provoked by our conversations I found myself hugely frustrated. Racial injustice is a white person’s problem, it is our (I write as a white person to our white readers) inability and unwillingness to see the full humanity of people who look different to us because it serves us to continue the historic fallacy that Whiteness is somehow superior and the ‘normal’ way for a human to be. That we inflict our blindness and selfishness on black people is not for them to correct, it is for us to repent and learn, to

see the reality of white brokenness and of the beauty of our black sisters and brothers. Given this, how is it fair or right for us to require black people to engage with our questions, our ignorance, and our desires, however earnest? Care and compassion within these Communities of Practice meant naming this, owning this, that the black participants did not owe the white participants anything, in fact the debt is the other way around.

For their part many white participants came to the groups with some nervousness, wanting to learn, acknowledging to varying degrees the gaps in their insight. Robin DiAngelo's term 'white fragility' describes "emotions such as anger, fear, guilt and behaviours such as argumentation, silence and withdrawal" expressed by white people in response to conversations about race which work to "repel the challenge, return our racial comfort and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy" (DiAngelo, 2018, 2). The white participants in our groups, while for the most part not familiar with DiAngelo's work, were wanting to avoid 'white fragility' and respond with openness and humility, to resist defending and justifying, although there were moments which challenged all participants in this respect.

Opening dialogue in mixed, intercultural groups is a positive step forward. It communicates the message that black siblings matter, black stories matter, black voices matter, black journey's matter, black needs matter. Furthermore, black voices and experience need to be key contributors shaping responses and redemption in terms of racial justice. Such dialogue and collaboration are simply not possible or authentic without the kinds of redemptive rehearsals enabled by the CoP process.

The interpersonal task in the CoP groups was to *decolonise the way we relate to people of difference*. It took time and reflection for the groups to understand this fundamental task and to recognise the cost and risk for participants in such a process. The nature of colonisation is to dominate and oppress a particular group, exploiting their gifts and assets, justified by a belief in the fundamental superiority of the dominant group (Hopkins, 2012. 7). In intercultural conversational spaces colonial dynamics can resurface with one group being 'mined' for their experiences or insights for the benefit of the other group. In contemporary conversations about racial injustice this looks like black people being asked to make themselves vulnerable, sharing stories of personal pain or sharing their particular wisdom for the benefit of white listeners without due regard or respect for their choice in what or how to share, their particular areas of expertise or their wellbeing. In our communities of practice particular care was required through strong and sensitive facilitation to ensure that participants were able to offer what they chose to rather than feeling obliged. That their stories were offered and shared not extracted for the benefit of white participants.

A facet of any form of oppression is 'othering', the failure to see an individual as a unique human person and instead deeming them as representative of all of a particular social, cultural or ethnic group. (Anthony Reddie alludes to this in his article *Now you see me, now you don't: subjectivity, blackness, and difference in practical theology in Britian post Brexit*. 2018) In our intercultural conversations we uncovered this harmful *generalisation*, initially through a desire from a white participant to name their own perspective:

'I say that as a white male, with all that that comes with'.

This raised questions for some black participants: *Can a white man know 'all that that comes with'?* The discussion that followed was a reaction to *'all that comes with'* being a white man. During this the white participant recognised a shift in that they were hearing responses not to them as a unique person but to the archetypal *'white man with all that that comes with'*. They found this profoundly uncomfortable, responding: *'last time I looked Putin was a white man and I'm not him'*. This led to the recognition of this kind of generalisation as part of the daily experience of black participants, including the intersectional impact for black female participants. One woman described the *'huge pressure'* she felt as a black, Christian woman with all the dimensions of representation that this brought. It was uncomfortable, particularly for the white participant involved, but powerful in that it raised the issue of representation and gave opportunity for empathy and the acknowledgement of this expression of injustice. Acknowledging and valuing one another's individual human personhood rather than generalising their racial or gender identity became part of the group's way of relating. In the final session, during prayer for one another we experienced a reversal of the archetypal power imbalance. The black women participants prayed, and the white male participant simply responded amen, honouring and celebrating their spirituality and offering a profound counter-narrative to white supremacy. This reflected the meeting together which had happened through the transformative work of the Spirit during the CoP.

Compassion, feeling with, in the context of intercultural conversations about racial injustice must necessarily include space for both lament and repentance. Feelings of being *'to blame'* or complicit in racial oppression are deeply uncomfortable for white people and can result in *'white fragility'* responses. However, having learnt on the Black Light course about our socio-cultural context of Whiteness, expressed in White supremacy and colonialism, our white participants were, to varying degrees journeying beyond defensiveness towards an acknowledgement of their own privilege and sorrow and repentance for their complicity in the system which benefits them while disadvantaging black people. Sessions included moments of shared sorrow and at times overwhelm in the face such an all-pervasive injustice. Experiencing this range of emotion together was an important part of being a community of practice, learning from and feeling with one another.

Clearly, within such work there is a need for pastoral care for participants and the nature of this became clearer to us as the CoP groups developed. Careful facilitation aimed to ensure that conversations within the sessions were challenging but not harmful to participants. Bringing to the fore issues of racial injustice in a new setting, risks being destabilising or re-traumatising for black group members. The enormity of white privilege and systemic racism can, and at times did, bring feelings of shame, and overwhelm for white participants. For both black and white group members the material in the Black Light course which examined the ways in which Christianity has been intertwined with colonialism and has been shaped by it was shocking. Participants began to acknowledge that colonial ideas and values, fundamentally Whiteness, are embedded in our own contemporary expressions of Christianity and are continuing to cause pain.

The Black Light course and the CoP sessions were beginning to unearth embedded practices and ideologies, making participants vulnerable in different ways. As we engaged in the process, we began to realise the cost of the journey in time, vulnerability, and self-awareness for us as a facilitation and research team and for participants. Recognising this we decided early in the CoP process to offer pastoral follow up conversations to participants after each session; after the groups had finished we also offered a feedback conversation. It was the black participants who responded to the offer of pastoral conversations during the CoP process and, for the most part, white participants who took part in a feedback conversation after the groups ended. This contrast perhaps highlights the ability of white people to step back from issues of racial justice in a way that is impossible for black people. White participants were able to separate themselves from the content with its historical and present impact, they could choose to leave it in the session or course. For black people, both participants and facilitators, it is deeply personal and a lived reality of injustice requiring a different kind of self-care and support.

Experiencing compassion with and caring for one another across cultural difference in the CoP process was another facet of redemptive rehearsal in that it modelled what we hope to see happen more and more in people's daily lives and practice. Facing and owning the discomfort that can come with that is part of the work of justice, loosing the bonds of wickedness even, and especially, within ourselves. The lived experience of the CoP group seemed to equip and enable participants, to 'teach' wisdom, which they could take into their own contexts. In all this,

Key messages and implications:

- **Pastoral care is required beyond the groups themselves.**
The transformative journey happens both within the sessions and as a result of them in the space in between gatherings. We offered pastoral conversations with either a black or white facilitator to all participants, and those who accepted the offer found it helped them to remain engaged in the process. The painful realities of racial injustice meant that these conversations needed care and sensitivity. For others doing this work, ensuring that funding and resources are available for this pastoral support is essential.
- **Care for people more than the content they are sharing.**
In any group, organisation or community seeking to engage in intercultural conversation, decolonising ways of relating and conversing is an important task. Prioritising the care of people as humans, above any hope to 'learn from them' is vital to break cycles of the exploitation of black people and to create a genuinely intercultural space.
- **Collaboration as opposed to the inclusion of black voices.**
In white dominated spaces the language of inclusion can simply equate to having black people in the room or contributing to the conversation. This will not dismantle

systemic racism as it requires black people to engage on the terms of white supremacy. Instead, mutuality at every step of the journey is required to collaborate interculturally and create authentic and diverse learning communities benefitting both black and white Christians as we grow in Christ together.

- **Creating space within programmes for flexibility and sensitivity to the different needs and stories in the room.**

This section indicates that it can be easy for white facilitators/organisers to underestimate the weight of intercultural conversations around racial justice. It is important that intercultural facilitation teams recognise the different desires or needs that black and white participants may bring. Within sessions, enabling an atmosphere conducive to lament and to a diversity of emotions is essential. Likewise following up between sessions with compassion and action where necessary is an essential part of the process. Attempting these conversations without this could have been harmful rather than helpful.

What did we achieve? Post-colonial and/or intercultural space

In Lartey's analysis of the need for post-colonial practices he refers to an 'internalised authoritarian epistemology' which maintains colonial patterns and upholds systemic racism (Lartey, 2013, p xii). This resonates with Willie James Jennings' work on the white male dominance within the theological academy (Jennings 2020) and for us, working in this project in informal theological education among practicing Christians (many of whom were leaders with prior formal theological education) these realities inspired us both in our approach to the Community of Practice model and in our aspirations for the impact this might have in the lives of participants.

We aimed for decolonising and at times hit this target. It was uncomfortable work, in one session a facilitator offered two images of systemic violence, a lynching and the crucifixion. One graphic and raw, the other romanticised, gentle even. In the session notes I (Anna) reflected on these:

Is this what colonialised-ness is, it makes violence and abuse of power sanitised... into soft focus, ultimately it makes it palatable to an ordinary person who knows it's 'not their doing'. ... 'decolonising' is/has to be unveiling, revealing, facing the disturbing reality of violence and abuse of power.

While we did some of this disturbing revealing, nonetheless we often found that our, especially white, participants were only newly aware of the ongoing influence of colonialism on their thinking. This meant that while the CoP model and facilitation approach that we adopted may have resonance with Lartey's post-colonial practices the conversations themselves more closely resembled his work on interculturality. Lartey writes:

'Every human person is in certain respects:

1. LIKE ALL OTHERS

2. LIKE SOME OTHERS

3. LIKE NO OTHER' (2003, 304-5)

An understanding of every human person being 'like all others' was foundational to our approach to the Communities of Practice. Groups created opportunities where participants could identify with each other, and noticing this, reflecting on it and sharing how important those human moments were together was paramount to our learning. The Black Light course content and development of its themes through the CoP process took seriously the collective experiences, thoughts, and concerns of both black and white participants, creating space for patterns and issues to be identified and reflected upon with care and compassion. This affirmed our 'like some others'-ness in that it validated the importance and influence of the communities in which participants have been socialised (Lartey, 2003. 307-8). Likewise, we engaged as individuals and both named and resisted generalisation and representation, group members were also seen and experienced as simply themselves, 'like no other'.

For Lartey 'Interculturality is a creative response to the pluralism that is a fact of life in present-day society. It calls for the affirmation of three basic principles: contextuality, multiple perspectives and authentic participation.' (2003, 287-8). His contextuality involves paying serious attention to the frameworks and environments where beliefs and behaviours emerge from to gain understanding. Multiple perspectives refers to giving significant weight and space to different voices, experiences and conclusions. Lartey asserts that all perspectives are 'equally deserving of attention', and that through the process of 'listening and dialogue' much more can be understood. He describes authentic participation as 'mutual concern for the integrity of [each] other', within which he 'affirms the right of all to participate in discussion and examination of an issue on their own terms' (2003, 291-8).

Within the CoP groups intercultural spaces, conversations and worship were defined by a black participant as '*not having one set way, so no one gets comfortable, no one culture dominates... ..listening and co-creating something together*'. While a vital facet of engagement with racial injustice this also seemed to point to a foundational principle for human relating across all forms of marginalisation: to relate to one another as persons made in the image of God, coming alongside and being and doing with rather than for or to. Ultimately this is expressed in learning from and receiving the gift of God in those who are different from you.

The Black Light course offered much in terms of contextuality as it covered the history and impacts of the entanglement between Christianity and colonialism and the neglected history of black presence and experience in the Bible and church history. The CoP groups each began by processing this information and its legacy within theological education, ministerial training, and their own Christian contexts. Recognising these long and deep stories and identifying the ways in which they were still impacting participants lives was a starting point for change.

Creating a safer space and building trust in relationships enabled facilitators to ‘recognise and affirm multiple [as well as] conflicting perspectives’ (Lartey, 2006, 11). Lartey emphasises the need to ‘name the perspectives and to explore how they may be related to context’ as well as deeply respecting lived experience (2006, 11). Holding the threads of contextual influence and immediate lived experience was part of the task of CoP facilitators who aimed to do this for themselves and thereby to encourage others in this kind of self-awareness.

Authentic participation in the context of the CoP groups meant that participants were invited to share responsibility for the space and to offer as much or as little to the discussion as they felt they could. Encouraging people to come as they are to each session and trusting that God is at work in the particularity of each encounter has been central to our facilitation approach and to enabling group members to participate as themselves, with whatever emotions, convictions, and questions they may be carrying. As one participant reflected: ‘*People were open and honest, the most important thing*’. Many white participants were concerned to encourage more participation among black people in their majority white church contexts. The concept of interculturality as listening and co-creating together was both challenging and helpful as it points towards the need for authentic participation of *all* members of a congregation. Recognising the need for white people to lay down their power to make space for the personhood and power of black people was a reoccurring challenge for white participants throughout the group sessions. Receiving and processing this challenge and considering how it might look in practice is the journey of each white participant. The CoP groups demonstrated both the vulnerability of seeking racial equity and the gift of receiving one another as persons made in God’s image. Groups recognised that the more diverse the voices in the room the fuller our glimpse of God’s glory can be together, that monocultures are impoverished and unsustainable places, not conducive to human flourishing.

Drawing on Lartey’s work the ideas of post-colonial practices and interculturality are both evident to some degree in this research. Our approach to facilitation and to the research invited participants to see themselves and others as reflective practitioners in the work of racial justice in their own lives and contexts. We worked relationally and flexibly, receiving the different perspectives and life situations of group members as part of the gift of each group and encouraging them towards ‘action-for-change’ (Lartey, 2013. Xvi-xxii). What emerged were intercultural encounters which we see as *redemptive rehearsals*. Within the CoP sessions participants experimented with and experienced the forming of mutual, respectful, and equitable relationships with people of difference. They shared themselves in vulnerability and they offered care and concern for one another in that sharing. They grew in self-awareness and in awareness of the lives of others from different ethnicities. The insight and experience gained through the sessions enabled participants to engage with their contexts and seek to build relationships locally with more courage and clarity. The sessions were transformative for participants in and of themselves, however they also paved the way for acting differently in life beyond the sessions. In this sense they were both redemptive, and an intercultural rehearsal space for the ongoing intercultural work of racial justice.

Summary of recommendations and conclusion

Our research questions in starting this project were:

Can a Community of Practice support people to change their ways of living and working in response to issues of race and diversity?

How can online groups create and sustain relationships which facilitate reflective practice?

Throughout the process we have found a form of facilitated Community of Practice which is focused on accompanying one another as peers on a journey to be profoundly helpful in supporting individuals' journeys toward racial justice. Groups create significant moments in themselves as they see one another person to person and receive both the challenge and the gift of each other's personhood. As discrete and somewhat abstracted online encounters they also act as rehearsal space for daily life in which building intercultural relationships of mutuality can be practiced and celebrated. In this sense an online group is suited to enabling reflective practice as it holds a reflective space, both intimate to participants context (within their home, workplace, or device) and distinct from it. The groups challenged and changed the awareness of particularly white participants. For some, it began to change their practices, especially in confronting racism when they encountered it. While the work did not perhaps have the tangible impact we may have aspired to, the groups started from where the participants were in their journeys of racial self-awareness and this alongside our new-ness to the work contributed to the distinctive story and outcomes of this research.

We have included key messages and implications of our research alongside each theme. Here is a summary of these, offered as recommendations for the different stakeholders and audiences for this work.

Recommendations for the Black Light course and other content-led racial justice courses:

- The centrality of racial justice to our understanding of the gospel should be explicit within the Black Light course and other formal and informal theological education programmes.
- A conversational space is a necessary accompaniment to content-led racial justice courses and needs to be prioritised and appropriately resourced.

Recommendations for formal theological education institutions:

- Create opportunities for staff to access the Black Light course (or similar) and participate in intercultural Communities of Practice focused on racial justice as part of their professional and personal development.
- Review 'core' material in curriculums and consider including an 'Introduction to Normativity and Difference' element and an ongoing intercultural reflective space to enable critical self-reflection.

Recommendations for church communities:

- Prioritise diversity of voice and hermeneutical perspective in church life.
- Work interculturally, collaborating and co-creating as opposed to just the inclusion of black bodies and voices.

Recommendations for facilitators of intercultural conversations on racial justice:

- Intercultural conversations can only start from where participants are. It is vital to be attentive to their journeys and flexible to adapt to various starting points.
- Intercultural conversations need careful framing and facilitation by those already on the journey themselves to hold participants in the vulnerability required.
- Have clarity on the purpose of intercultural conversation: to enable connection across difference, person to person.
- Ensure that appropriate pastoral care is provided for both participants and facilitators within and beyond the sessions themselves.
- Prioritise care for participants as people above concern for the content they are sharing.
- Ensure that in your approach there is space and confidence to be flexible and sensitive to the different needs and stories in the room.
- Every group will be different, it is imperative to keep learning as a facilitation team. Reflect together and maintain your own journey into racial justice.

This has been a small study and a first step into racial justice work for Urban Life. Inevitably it is limited and with experience our understanding and approach will develop further. Nonetheless it can offer an insight into shaping intercultural conversations on racial justice and the gifts and challenges that this activity offers. We asked our initial questions based on what we could see at the time. From the new vantage point of this research and the continuing Communities of Practice we are asking different questions about the huge need for intercultural conversation person to person, the wider application of this approach within theological education and the need for support for churches and organisations to address racial injustice within their own structures and communities. We offer this work from our journey as an aid to those looking for assistance or accompaniment on theirs. In this we recognise that the struggle for justice is not easy. Reaching across divisions in cultures and across imbalances of power is not easy. Moving from obliviousness to awareness and recognising the pain that white supremacy has and continues to cause to black people is not easy. Honestly acknowledging our own role and complicity in racial oppression is not easy. Changing our behaviour is not easy. Commitment to the ongoing work of racial justice involves a continuing need to learn and live together with humility, courage, and tenacity with the aim of enabling redemptive rehearsals that translate into the habits of daily life and work.

Bibliography

Courduff, Jennifer. *Community of practice foundations in Scripture: a model of vocational preparation*. in *Practical Theology* 11(4): 334-346. 2018.

- DiAngelo, Robin. *White Fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Allen Lane 2018.
- Gerbner, Katharine. *Christian Slavery, Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World*. University of Pennsylvania Press. 2018.
- Hopkins, Dwight, N. General Introduction, in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*. Cambridge University Press. 2012.
- Jennings, W. J. *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*. Wm. B. Eerdmans. 2020.
- Lartey, Emmanuel Y. *Post-Colonializing God: New perspectives on pastoral and practical theology*. SCM Press. 2013.
- Lartey, Emmanuel Y. *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*. Wipf & Stock. 2006.
- Lartey, Emmanuel Y. *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling second edition*. Jessica Kingsley. 2003.
- Mason, Jennifer. *Qualitative Researching second edition*. Sage. 2002.
- McCormack Steinmetz. Ann. Doing, in *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within circles*. Ely, Margot ed. Falmer Press. 1991.
- Reddie, Anthony *Now you see me, now you don't: subjectivity, blackness and difference in practical theology in Britian post Brexit*, in *Practical Theology* 11, 1, pp4-16. 2018.
- Strhan, Anna. *Aliens and Strangers? The Struggle for Coherence in the Everyday lives of Evangelicals*. Oxford University Press. 2015.
- Taylor, Steve and Dewerse, Rosemary. *Unbounding learning communities: Ako-empowered research in life-long ministerial formation*, in *Practical Theology* 13(4): 400-412. 2020.
- Wenger-Trayner, E. and Wenger-Trayner B. 2015. Introduction to Communities of Practice. *Wenger-Trayner.com*. Accessed 10/7/2023. <https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>