



Sacred Solidarity Network

What is MARCH?

MARCH has its roots in twenty years of multi-faith relationships and commitment to pro-LGBTQ work, including the Marriage Equality campaign. We have come together as MARCH to help organize predominantly white faith communities in support of and solidarity with Black Lives Matter and other efforts to dismantle racism and white supremacy.

What is the Sacred Solidarity Network?

The Sacred Solidarity Network is a project MARCH is piloting. We are inviting 6-12 'pilot' congregations to be part of a one-year cohort, working in collaboration to address racism and white supremacy in ourselves, our congregations, and the wider world.

MARCH is collaborating with a number of other organizations to pilot the Sacred Solidarity Network project. Partner organizations include the Center for Sustainable Justice; Kaleo Center for Faith, Justice & Social Transformation; OutFront MN; and the MN Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance.

What's required of participating faith communities?

Sacred Solidarity Network Members agree to participate in the following:

- ▶ A 'launch' retreat on September 11th, 2016 from 1:00–7:00 for each congregation's project team (clergy + lay leaders)
- ▶ Clergy preparation/support lunch on August 11, 2016
- ▶ A monthly meeting with congregational team leaders
- ▶ A system of support for team leaders and congregations
- ▶ Shared accountability
- ▶ Capturing learnings
- ▶ Refining framework & process
- ▶ Assessment and Renewal Retreat - Spring 2017

What do faith communities get as a result of their participation?

- ▶ Access to trainings and curated resources
- ▶ A collaboratively developed framework that helps you evaluate your faith community's efforts to realize a vision of racial justice in six key areas: Encounter, Education, Advocacy, Organizing, Envisioning, Proclamation
- ▶ Support and consulting from MARCH colleagues where needed/appropriate
- ▶ Being part of a multi-faith network of faith leaders sharing challenges and developing solutions in collaboration

We're asking interested faith communities to have an initial conversation with a member of the MARCH team and to get formal organizational buy-in and sign-off in the manner that's appropriate for your faith community.

MARCH PHILOSOPHY AND STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

THE LEADERSHIP OF FAITH COMMUNITIES IN ADDRESSING WHITE SUPREMACY

Faith communities have long been prophetic institutions, naming bold visions for justice and equity in our society and working in partnership to realize that vision. In the face of our deep awareness of the brokenness of our systems and institutions, communities of faith are being called to live out our deepest values and beliefs as shapers of the Beloved Community and as partners in movements for social justice. We believe that faith communities are critical to the success of movements for racial justice and have a responsibility to use our spiritual and social power, infrastructures, and access to promote a more just and loving world.

In particular, people of faith are called to respond to the woundedness that festers among people of all races as a result of the structural injustices perpetrated by the idolatrous and immoral system of white supremacy¹ in which all of us in the United States live. This destructive system of privilege and oppression demeans our humanity and our divinity. .

To address this brokenness white people must confess the many ways we are complicit and benefit from the complex, interrelated systems of white privilege. This requires white people to do deep work understanding the history and development of whiteness as a social construct, their own white racial identity, and the ways in which whiteness is intimately tied to and buttresses white supremacy.

For predominately white congregations to participate effectively and accountably in this work, however, there is a delicate balance between taking bold action to dismantle the systems of structural racism and cultivating the humility needed to wholeheartedly listen to the guidance and leadership of people of color. We must acknowledge both our privilege and our power; we must be ready to organize ourselves while also taking cues from leaders of color. We refer to this work as [a spiritual discipline of followership](#).²

SACRED SOLIDARITY: OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

As MARCH, we affirm that white supremacy is created and sustained by white people and that predominantly-white faith communities have a unique role and responsibility to leverage our spiritual and social power and infrastructure for the work of dismantling the dehumanizing system of white supremacy. Transformation—personal, institutional, and systemic—comes from long-term practices that build relationships, maintain accountability, encourage continued reflection, sustain deep commitment, and call community members to act with boldness, humility, and courage

Like any form of alliance for change, followership and prophetic action for racial justice require an ongoing cycle of action and reflection. In this cycle, members of the community are called to act boldly and repeatedly within and beyond their own walls, and to reflect on the learnings, feedback, and discernment that are

¹ “White Supremacy is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.”

²We use the term 'followership' intentionally, not as a synonym for the Christian concept of 'discipleship,' but rather in contrast with the idea of 'leadership.' In general, white people are assumed to be leaders, and--especially those of us who also have class, gender, and educational privilege-- have a tendency to show up only when we will be in charge, dictating the agenda. We believe that the ability to trust, support, and humbly follow the leadership of people of color is a core spiritual discipline, and one that must be cultivated over time.

generated through that action. This reflection then informs next steps, which then open up opportunities for further reflection, and so on. Our approach is an “action praxis” (analysis, strategic action, reflection and evaluation) that integrates education and training, strategic action and ongoing reflection within an intentional community of practice, to provide support and accountability. We call this Sacred Solidarity.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DO WE HOPE TO MAKE?

Through this MARCH collaborative, we intend to create a broad community of allies acting in sacred solidarity to dismantle white supremacy and advance racial justice. Outcomes include:

- Rapid Response mobilization to requests from communities of color for solidarity and in support of *racial justice actions*. (For example, , clergy and faith leaders occupied city hall on December 3, 2015 to create sacred space for the arrival of BLM activists who had previously been denied access.)
- Ongoing leadership development, support and organizing with congregations to engage in bold, strategic and sustained racial justice action balanced with the humility needed to deeply listen to the guidance and leadership of people of color.
- Development of a network of “Sacred Solidarity” congregations with defined benchmarks for: arenas of action, congregational characteristics and engagement expectations.
- Evaluation of our effectiveness in conducting this capacity building work and collective impact of congregations.
- Refine training and engagement framework and expand network to 25+ congregations by 2018.

REPENTANCE AND REPAIR

The Sacred Solidarity Network uses a frame of Yom Kippur/Atonement and Confession-Repentance-Repair-Reconciliation. Repair, , is essential to demonstrating and realizing authentically our repentance.

We understand that over-focusing on white guilt and whitewashed, abstract notions of reconciliation are ways for white people of faith to take up too much space in the conversation about racial justice, thereby reinforcing the white supremacist idea that ours is the most important voice at the table. Instead, we validate the authenticity of our repentance, as Jennifer Harvey writes, by moving on to repair which includes the often painful work of recognizing and refusing to participate in the system of white supremacy. Only then--after we as white people have done our own work-- can we really begin to seek reconciliation with those who have suffered at our hands. Dedicated action and practice are the important next steps to keep the work moving, accountable to people of color and away from unnecessary abstraction.

FORMS OF PRACTICE

Learning from the movement among congregations of many traditions to become welcoming institutions for LGBTQIA+ people, MARCH has developed a framework for religious communities entering into and sustaining long-term commitments to racial justice as spiritual work. MARCH will collaborate with participants, who will help define the shape and scope of our work together.

While we offer a framework for our shared journey toward racial equity, it is expected that together, we will refine the framework, explore creative ways of living out racial justice practices, discern together the essential characteristics of Sacred Solidarity congregations, evaluate our collective impact and expand the network of Sacred Solidarity congregations. *Our framework for action contains six integrated areas of practice, representing six distinct strategies. Viewed individually, each practice provides unique opportunities for action, each with a distinct focus and intended result. Viewed as a whole, the practices form a comprehensive strategy for transformation.*

The work of racial justice demands that we not wait until we are perfectly comfortable, or perfectly ready, to “do something.” Instead, we are called to act boldly, reflect upon and learn from our actions, then act again, informed by our new knowledge and experience. We are asking Sacred Solidarity congregations to act across all six practice areas.

ENCOUNTER: Igniting Personal Transformation

The congregation cultivates cultural and spiritual humility and develops deep and accountable relationships. Encounter connects us to the context and setting from which our action springs. The congregation stands in solidarity and offers concrete support to resource movements for racial justice. The congregation prioritizes nurturing the spiritual and emotional health of justice leaders.

Internal

- ▶ Offering a small group ministry program specifically designed to connect racial justice leaders to one another and address issues of burnout, heartbreak, disappointment, forgiveness, humility, etc.
- ▶ Placing term-limits on social justice leadership, building a culture that values shared ministry and regular turnover of power.
- ▶ Offering opportunities for justice leaders to learn about and engage in both individual and corporate forms of spiritual practice.
- ▶ Creating a team of “justice chaplains” who understand the particular spiritual and emotional impacts of sustained engagement with struggles for justice, and who can respond to these needs as they naturally arise among those participating in justice work

External

- ▶ Providing a meal for the public gathering of a grassroots organizing group without a budget
- ▶ Using your social media and/or newsletter to lift up organizing done by frontline communities and organizations
- ▶ Letting a people of color-led organization use office space, meeting space, or copying/printing equipment for their organizing work.

EDUCATE: Forming Persons for Public Faith

Education equips us with the knowledge, competence and confidence we need in order to act. The congregation offers regular opportunities for members to learn about justice issues, gain concrete

Internal

- ▶ Launching a book group to read *The New Jim Crow*, *The Death of Josseline*, *Between the World & Me*, etc.; film screenings of “Selma,” “Fruitvale Station,” “Race: The Power of an Illusion.”
- ▶ Holding regular forums featuring reflections on whiteness and racial justice issues by local and/or national activists.
- ▶ Building strong leadership development programs for new and returning leaders; cultivating leadership among people who are outside of the dominant culture of the congregation, and investing - in their development.

skills, and develop an informed analysis.

External

- ▶ Investing in community organizing/movement building training (often outside of the congregation) for members who will hold social justice leadership positions within the congregation.
- ▶ Bringing in trainers and facilitators from movement organizations to increase congregational capacity and competency.

ADVOCATE: Forging Systems for a Just and Sustainable World

The congregation engages in systemic analysis. Advocacy addresses the (internal & external) systems, processes, policies, plans, institutional arrangement, forms, procedures, and structures through which justice is expressed. Advocacy is about systems change and advancing sustainable and just structures.

Internal

- ▶ Amending congregational bylaws, goal statements and strategic plans to include an institutional commitment to racial justice, complete with measures for assessing compliance and success
- ▶ Doing a congregational audit, examining the ways in which the congregation has and has not done faithful and accountable work for racial justice throughout its history and in which areas. Making this information available to the whole congregation.
- ▶ Ensuring that staff are fairly compensated and that real authority and decision-making power is accorded to women, people of color, queer and trans people, etc.

External

- ▶ Identify a policy issue you will track and take a leadership role addressing.
- ▶ Identify and advocate structural solutions to white supremacy.

ORGANIZE: Harnessing Power for Participatory Democracy

Organizing enlivens commitment and energy for powerful action. Organizing is about harnessing durable power. The congregation is self-aware about its resources and networks and is willing to use this power to channel support into movement building beyond

Internal

- ▶ committing to nurture the spiritual and emotional health of its justice leaders.
- ▶ Taking up special collections/passing the plate to support the work of racial justice-oriented organizations and making long-term commitments to those organizations.
- ▶ Strategically leveraging the congregations' human and financial resources in service of its racial justice mission.
- ▶ Consciously instituting collaboration and accountability in positions of power and authority within the congregation; access to power through leadership development is transparent and accessible.

the congregation.

External

- ▶ Joining the local congregation-based community organizing group
- ▶ Joining the local interfaith racial justice network
- ▶ Organizing a rapid response in solidarity with communities targeted by hate crimes, violence, unjust policy, etc.

ENVISION: Catalyzing Movements for Cultural Change

Envisioning makes connections, sets direction, makes plans, builds solidarity, accelerates collective action, and shapes a movement for change that goes beyond traditional boundaries of culture, faith, and race. Envisioning taps into prophetic imagination, calling forth new actions and new possibilities.

Internal

- ▶ Re-imagining outmoded, issue-based committee structures, encouraging collaboration, mutual education and partnership.

External

- ▶ Hiring consultants and outside trainers (e.g., capital campaign planners, governance consultants, financial advisors, retreat leaders) who explicitly bring an intersectional lens to the work.
- ▶ Doing a pulpit exchange and/or joint worship service with a congregation of color, exchanging ideas about what each faith says about justice in the image of God.

PROCLAIM: Transforming Worldviews for the Beloved Community

Proclamation names and frames the "why" of our action. Proclamation articulates the significance, legitimacy and meaning of our deepest values, histories, relationships and shared aspirations. The congregation regularly, boldly, and publicly

Internal

- ▶ Extending regular invitations to community partners, justice workers and members of marginalized communities to speak in your pulpit - and not always about "their issue!"
- ▶ Creating opportunities for congregants to engage in rituals of confession, atonement, forgiveness, and re-commitment.
- ▶ Incorporating justice themes as a regular part of worship throughout the liturgical year. Justice concerns are reflected not only in issue-based sermons, but in prayers, offerings, readings, hymns, covenants.
- ▶ Building a "Responding to Our World" reflection ministry, in which people gather each month to consider the events of the world and the local community through a theological lens.

proclaims its yearning for justice and equity as a natural outgrowth of its religious values.

External

- ▶ Encouraging clergy and/or lay leaders to write letters to the Editor, specifically identifying themselves as people of faith and articulating why their faith tradition calls us to the work of justice-making.
- ▶ Training a small “protest choir” to be ready with songs and chants fitting for movement spaces.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EMBODIED SACRED SOLIDARITY CONGREGATION

Accountability

- ▶ Congregation accepts, seeks out, and trusts leadership from communities of color, both internally and in external partnerships.
- ▶ Congregation has a process for candid self- reflection, responding to critique, and making amends for causing harm or falling short.
- ▶ Congregation adopts a posture of “how can we say yes” to requests for support, even when what is being asked is not what the congregation would have envisioned.
- ▶ Congregation views its stakeholders as both its own members and the broader community.

Spiritual Grounding

- ▶ Leaders consistently model faith tradition theology, history, polity, and practice as resources for interpreting justice issues and discerning how the community is called to respond to them.
- ▶ Justice-making is seen as religious work, and a part of regular spiritual practice for both individuals and the community.
- ▶ Pastoral skills are used to minister to resistance and willingness to move through resistance.
- ▶ Pastoral support is provided for activists.
- ▶ Congregation is spiritually rooted with commitment to prayer, ritual and celebration.
- ▶ Congregation embodies hope, joy and a playful dedication.

Systemic Integration

- ▶ A justice lens is applied to all activities, programs, and structures of the congregation.
- ▶ Multiple points of entry, each congregation represents a unique context and point on the journey.
- ▶ Social justice projects, teams, and activities are not “siloed,” but seen as a core ministry.

- ▶ Members of all ages, skill-sets, and identities are encouraged to engage in work for justice; a wide variety of opportunities for participation is offered.
- ▶ Congregation builds the skills required for systemic critique.

Theological and Cultural Humility

- ▶ Members are self-aware about their own identities and experiences, and can proactively avoid or address their own triggers and modify their behavior to make space for others.
- ▶ Congregation is able to establish and maintain mutual relationships with groups who have very different cultures and theologies.
- ▶ Congregation knows that its ways of doing things are relative, and not “the way.”
- ▶ Members are able and committed to an orientation of action and theological reflection.
- ▶ Congregation is committed to learning and refining the MARCH model and framework of engagement.

Outward-Facing Orientation

- ▶ Congregation has diverse institutional relationships with local and national organizations and movements for justice; members are knowledgeable about, feel personal investment in, and demonstrate commitment to partnerships.
- ▶ Congregation sees its mission as extending beyond the walls of its building, and sees value in becoming a known and trusted entity in the community.
- ▶ Congregation engages in robust collaboration outside of the congregation.

Power Analysis and Self-Awareness

- ▶ Congregation is aware of and willing to strategically leverage its human and financial resources in service of its mission.
- ▶ Power and authority are shared and accountable; access to power through leadership development is transparent and accessible.

Ability to Tolerate Ambiguity

- ▶ Congregation can engage with partners with whom they do not always completely agree.
- ▶ Congregation can move forward even when there is disagreement, resistance, or dissent.
- ▶ Congregation responds to unexpected events, and the spiritual and practical needs that arise as a result, without being held back by rigid decision-making structures.

Commitment to Mission

- ▶ Fulfilling the community's mission is widely seen as more important than accommodating every individual member's desires and preferences.
- ▶ Congregation's mission is in service of communities and values that transcend their specific faith tradition.
- ▶ Congregation shows commitment to learning and refining the model and framework of engagement.

Intersectionality

- ▶ Congregation understands that systems of oppression such as white supremacy and racism, misogyny and sexism, homo-, bi- and transphobia and heterosexism, ableism, etc. are connected and cannot be overcome individually or separately.
- ▶ Congregations organize at the intersections of justice movements and employ strategies, such as universal design, which address the web of oppressions.
- ▶ Congregation understands that systems of oppression center the voices and perspectives of the powerful. Knowing this, the congregation will seek to center the voices, perspectives and leadership of those most marginalized and affected by white supremacy as it weaves with other systems of oppression.

PROCESS

As your congregation explores ways in which it can, as a body and individually, work for racial justice and dismantling of systems of oppression, keep in mind the steps and the cycles described below. The impulse to commit too quickly or dive in headfirst to working on anti-racism and racial justice, although well-intentioned, runs the risks of sending members of your community backwards in this conversation. Second, this work must be accountable to communities of color and responsive to the needs of people of color in your own community.

Part of our work, indeed part of the larger project of dismantling white supremacy, is not to rush directly to a solution, to assume that we as white people are ‘fixers.’ Our project starts with acknowledgement and admission/confession of wrongs, of the systems of inequality and violence. We must look at and publicly name these wrongs and repent and atone for them. This is a spiritual practice, for it forces us as people of faith to address the ways in which we have, consciously or not, turned off our spigot of empathy, how we have allowed our capacity for connections with others to atrophy. Grief is part of this process of acknowledging our complicity in systems of oppression. This grief is important, because examining how we benefit from and perpetuate white privilege is more important than insulating white fragility and avoiding uncomfortable questions and realities.

The process for faith communities working to dismantle racism and contribute to the movement for racial justice is an iterative, rather than linear, one. Repair and repentance, action and reflection, will happen as cycles rather than a step-by-step process. Often the work for racial justice demands that we show up right now or take immediate action, rather than waiting to act until after what the community has determined to be the period of reflection and repentance. A community ought to come together after action steps are taken to reflect on the work, flag problems, and examine dynamics before engaging in further work.

MARCH has suggested the following steps in order to begin a process of acknowledgement, repentance, repair, and reconciliation as a community and work towards the goals of racial justice. These steps will help to engage members in the work, identify key messengers and a core team, addressing questions of members, and set frameworks and goals for action.

Possible Steps:

1. Leading the Process

Building a Racial Justice team will require many one-on-one conversations with potential core team members and stakeholders. As you engage in one-on-one conversations and eventually bring team members together as a group, it is necessary to make space for messy and imprecise questions about race, racism, whiteness, white supremacy, etc. These are important moments of communication, vulnerability, and clarity as a core team really starts to become open with one another.

- a. **Note:** Take care to create intentional spaces for these conversations to ensure that people of color aren't subjected to micro-aggressions amidst the messy-yet-necessary questions. For example, addressing a comment like, “I understand what Black Lives Matter is trying to accomplish, but can we talk about black-on-black crime” is important in order to debunk myths, examine power dynamics, address white privilege, etc. but can be an emotionally taxing and tokenizing comment/question for people of color in the community..

2. Gathering Information—Community Assessment

- a. What are the views in a congregation? Who is invested in this work?
- b. What are the power dynamics in play in your congregation and community? What are the formal and informal decision-making structures?
- c. What does denominational affiliation/oversight look like?
- d. What is already on our plates? Does this work integrate with other goals?
- e. Something like the IDI? Determining where the bulk of the congregation is = what type of accountability and relationship to communities of color

3. The Process

- a. Outline the timing for the process. Take your community assessment into consideration. The process may need to be longer or shorter depending on the need for time-intensive one-on-one conversations. It also will depend on the formal decision-making process of your community.
- b. Do you already have a racial justice task force or committee in place? How long has that been in place and what steps have been taken so far?

4. Building Relationships

Recruiting and developing anti-racism core team members will take time and one-on-one conversations. As a facilitator and driver of racial justice work in your community, you may also need to build relationships and have in-depth conversations with those who have concerns or hesitations around engaging in this work. Take care as well to identify key messengers and allies who can support you in these conversations. Members or leaders from other communities may also be excellent allies and collaborators.

5. Allies and collaborators outside of your congregation

Again, maintaining accountability to communities of color is paramount as your congregation engages in the process of anti-racism and racial justice work. Accountability is a matter of action and reflection, question and dialogue, and encounter. The other element of accountability and support comes from ecumenical and multi-faith collaborators that include other congregations in this process and facilitators and coaches from MARCH.

6. Making it Official

Taking a vote as community or core team to engage in this work. Include the framework/cycle of action and reflection as part of this commitment to prevent a static, box-check, one-time, and/or superficial commitment to racial justice. Are there members or core team folks who are particularly eager to think about ritual and ceremony related to this decision? Engaging members on the spiritual practice/ritual component may help to build investment in the work.

7. Setting the Frame

MARCH borrows from Jennifer Harvey's model of confession-repentance-repair-reconciliation. Part of the task for your community is to interpret and adapt this model to your theology and practices. For example, the mechanism of confession and repentance change to atonement on Yom Kippur for Jewish communities. It is important to examine the baggage around the ideas of confession and repentance—these often have punitive tones for folks—and perhaps rework them for this task.

8. Providing Educational Opportunities

Provide resources and facilitate discussion of whiteness that helps people with understanding their racial identity but doesn't stop there. The challenge is to examine our participation in systems of oppression and white supremacy without re-centering whiteness as focal point of our work. This can be thought of as 'doing your homework:' making use of critical race theory, articles, films, books as white folks to have a baseline for discussion and again avoid perpetrating racial micro-aggressions in action and reflection.