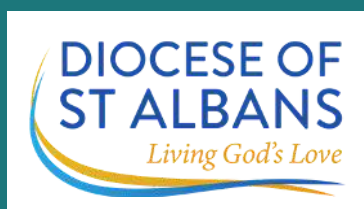


RACIAL JUSTICE COLLECTIVE WORSHIP



KEY CONCEPT/MESSAGE

Can I thrive here? This is a question to which not all say 'yes'. For many, prejudice and discrimination are constant barriers faced through their walks of life; these may be because of aspects such as gender, age, race, ability or culture. Many are boldly asserting the need for collective societal reflection and action in envisioning and enacting a more equitable future for all where everyone can thrive. Headteachers in the Diocese of St Albans convened at a conference in 2023 to demonstrate their commitment to this positive change.

This collective worship plan follows the conference and is designed to engage the school community in some of the themes discussed. In this plan, an interpretation of the Parable of the Sower is used to prompt personal and spiritual reflection upon our own stand to racism and other forms of discrimination.[1] The question, 'Which seed are we?', invites critical deliberation

- **are we like 'seeds that fall on the path'?** We are aware discrimination exists but don't know or care enough about it to do anything;
- **or are we like 'seeds that fall in good soil'?** Mindful of injustice and equality, we urgently stand as courageous advocates in being actively anti-racist so that all can thrive.

This is a complex area, but it is hoped that this act of collective worship will prompt important reflection on questions of racial equity and courageous advocacy. As we grow more aware of the manifold and diffuse manifestations – and impact – of discrimination, may we work hopefully and tenaciously for a world where all can thrive.

[1] Shola Mos-Shogbamimu (2021). This is why I resist (London: Headline Publishing Press)

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP PLAN

GATHER

Follow the school's normal gathering routines, using words of liturgy which are familiar to students and adults

or

Light a candle and offer the following prayer: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you'. Response: and also with you.

Show the words below on the PowerPoint. Invite student responses as to what they think they might refer to:

- Sexism
- Ageism
- Racism
- Heterosexism^[2]

State that the above are types of discrimination; there are more they may be aware of. They refer to unfair treatment based on someone's gender, age, race, ethnicity (including skin colour, where someone lives and/or was born, culture) or sexuality.

[2] The belief that only heterosexual relationships are valid

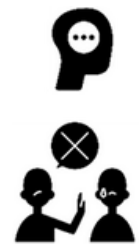
ENGAGE

Thinking about these types of discrimination are important as we consider the question, 'Do all thrive in the world?'. Sadly, not all people say they do. For many, this is because of the prejudice and discrimination they face. Let's look at the meaning of these words:

- **Prejudice:** a favouring or dislike of someone or something without good reason
- **Discrimination:** the treating of some people better than others without any fair or proper reason[3]

Let's take racism. Racism is treating someone unfairly because of the colour of their skin, their culture or where they were born and/or live. This unfairness might show in

- **Thinking** that those with a certain skin colour and/or background are better than others
- **Treating** others unpleasantly because of their skin colour and/or background



Indeed, recent surveys[4] have found a few shocking statistics. Here are a few:

- Many hear racist and unpleasant comments at school, work and when taking part in their hobbies
- Black workers with the same qualifications earn about a quarter less than those who are white
- Race is the most frequently recorded motivation of hate crime in England

[3] Definitions from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>.

[4] <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/race-report-statistics>;

https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/healing_a_divided_britain_-_the_need_for_a_comprehensive_race_equality_strategy_final.pdf;

<https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/racist-assaults-survey-finds/>

I wonder if any of you have ever seen this?

We're going to continue our thinking here through hearing about a story Jesus told to his followers – the Parable of the Sower. Read (or invite pupil(s) to read) the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13: 1-9 and 18-23):

<https://tinyurl.com/mpamyhwd>

Shola Mos-Shogbamimu [5] is a British-Nigerian lawyer. She comments regularly on discrimination and prejudices in society. In her book (This is why I resist), she takes this parable and asks readers, when it comes to the discrimination of racism, 'Which seed are you?'.



She says some are like the first seeds that fall on the path. These people hear about racism but don't understand or care about it so do absolutely nothing.



Some are like the seeds that fall on rocky places with little soil. These people are performative activists – once anti-racism is no longer trending, they fall away and do absolutely nothing.



Some are like the seeds that fall among the thorns. They want to be anti-racist, but their way of life benefits from a racist society. This lures them away.



She says others are like the seeds which fall on good soil. These people are appalled that there is racism in the world and so are committed to being actively anti-racist so that all can thrive.

[5] Image: by Shola Mos-Shogbamimu – own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=108331723>

What does it mean to be anti-racist? Those who are actively anti-racist are aware that racism exists and use their voices and actions to show this is not ok. For Shola, this links to the teaching of Jesus to love your neighbour as yourself. She states that:

there is 'no Biblical justification for...racism...especially as the Christian faith preaches that to love your neighbour as you love yourself is the second greatest commandment.'

She believes that we must use our actions and voices to make the world a place where all can say they thrive in the world.

RESPOND

Invite the school community to take a moment to reflect (NB: you may invite this reflection to be silent and personal, or to involve dialogue through a strategy such as think-pair-share):

- I wonder what Shola's words make you think about?
- I wonder what type of 'seed' you would like to be? Why?
- I wonder what the world would be like if more people were actively anti-racist?

Thank you for your reflections. I wonder how we can bring about a world where discrimination and prejudice of all kinds are a thing of the past; where all can say 'I thrive here'.

A prayer is offered below, adapted from the St Albans Living God's Love prayer. Invite the school community to make it their own, should they wish to, by saying 'amen' at the end.

Living God, draw us deeper into your love;
Jesus our Lord, send us to care and serve;
Holy Spirit, make us heralds of good news.
Stir us, strengthen us, teach and inspire us to live your love
and be 'seeds' who work for a fairer, more loving world
Amen

Alternatively, why not offer the opportunity for a student to offer a spontaneous prayer based on what we have been thinking about in this act of collective worship?

SEND

To close this act of worship, we will watch the first three minutes of this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d48-qbcovVY>). The video shows people from 154 nations – and 257 languages – singing a traditional Christian blessing. As we watch it together, I invite you to reflect on which 'seed' you would like to be; to think about how we can all work for a world where all can say 'I thrive here'.