Race and Faith: The Role of Congregations in Racial Justice

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In the summer of 2020, catalyzed by the killing of George Floyd, some places of worship more fully entered the conversation on race. Religious traditions often have tools for conflict resolution, repentance, and even reconciliation. How are congregations and religious leaders using the tools of religion to engage questions of racial justice? Our answers come through a multimethod data set collected over two years: (a) surveys of 2,293 congregants from 35 diverse congregations find that race relations is the issue they most want their place of worship to address; (b) 90 sermons from 15 congregations reveal how clergy talked about race in the weeks after Floyd's murder depended on racial background; (c) 21 clergy interviews illustrate differences in how clergy use religion to engage on racial issues; and (d) interviews with seven national leaders and focus groups with six congregations resulted in a collection of publicly-available faith-based racial justice resources.

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Racial inequality is a problem in America. From the wealth gap (Oliver and Shapiro 2019) to maternal mortality rates (Lister et al. 2019) to the frequency of traffic stops (Baumgartner, Epp, and Shoub 2018), the consequences of racism are pervasive and, all too often, deadly. In the summer of 2020, the ugly reality of racism was on full display in the murder of George Floyd. For more than nine minutes, Office Derek Chauvin kneeled on Floyd's neck while Floyd exclaimed that he couldn't breathe and called out for his mother—all while a child recorded video on a cell phone.

This event marked an inflection point at a time when conversations about race relations were already growing. Data from Twitter show that, between May 25 and June 5 of 2020, videos related to race and Black Lives Matters were watched over 1.4 billion times, making up 80% of the 100 most-viewed videos on Twitter during that time period (Blake 2020). Public opinion moved quickly, as well. In the two weeks following the murder of George Floyd, support for Black Lives Matter increased almost as much as it had in the previous two years, gaining 28 points of support in that time (Cohn and Quealy 2020). But these changes didn't last. By 2021, Twitter was back to cat videos and conspiracy theories, while public opinion with regards to Black Lives Matter had returned to the same baseline levels as before George Floyd's murder (Horowitz 2021).

But for some people and institutions, meaningful change did come as a result of the summer of 2020. State legislatures in the US passed over 140 new police oversight bills (Eder, Keller, and Migliozzi 2021), US-based companies hired significantly more Black executives in 2021 than they did in 2020 (DiNapoli 2021), and a number of US cities shifted their funding priorities away from policing and towards community, with some even explicitly addressing systemic racism (Turner 2021). Additionally, some places of worship got involved in faith-based racial justice efforts (RNS Staff 2021).

In many ways, religion seems particularly well-suited to address the challenges inherent in racial justice and reconciliation efforts. With faith-based resources like repentance and forgiveness, religion has helped to reconcile protracted conflicts from Northern Ireland to Mozambique (Bartoli 2005, Brewer, Mitchell, and Leavey 2013). Religion also has a history of engagement with the topic of racial justice in the United States in particular. Churches were organizing points for the civil rights movement and pastors were often major leaders (Hadden 1970, Barnes 2005, Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Given both the history and the resources of religion, we ask two questions: How did congregations use the tools of religion to engage questions of race in the weeks and years following the murder of George Floyd? And, looking further ahead, how might they?

Using both qualitative and quantitative data collected from one Southern city from 2020-2022, we find that congregants see their places of worship as resources for addressing issues of race, but that the extent and manner of congregational engagement with the topic varies. A clearer understanding of what congregations and clergy are doing about race and how religion can most effectively be brought to be bear on this critical social issue can inform both academic knowledge of religion's influence on politics and practitioner strategy for faith-based racial justice work. If congregations are going to make progress on racial justice and reconciliation for the long term, it will require drawing on the many faith-based resources religion can bring to bear on the problem.

Religion's Role in Justice and Reconciliation Work

Peacemaking organizations around the world have found that religion can be helpful for bringing parties in conflict to the table, finding solutions, and healing old wounds (Harpviken and Røislien 2008, Haynes 2009, Smock 2004). The Good Friday Accords involved religious leaders from both Protestant and Catholic faiths who used religious language (and political bargaining) to help bring the long, bloody years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland to a close (Brewer, Mitchell, and Leavey

2013, Beggan and Indurthy 2002, Jafari 2007). Even when a conflict isn't based in religion, those on the ground working to help resolve it often say that religious leaders and language are helpful (Glazier 2018).

It makes sense that some of the same tools that can be helpful in post-conflict justice movements, could also be helpful in healing some of the long-standing trauma of racial division and harm in the United States. Religion is, in many ways, naturally predisposed to resolve conflict. Our research here asks how religious congregations responded to racism following the racial reckoning of the summer of 2020. Religious traditions are often built on foundations of healing and reconciliation. Religion can use ritual and tradition to teach the lessons of forgiveness and moving forward. Take, for instance, the Ugandan cultural tradition of drinking *mato oput,* a drink made of bitter roots, in a particular ceremony led by religious leaders, which helps to bury the hurt between former enemies (Bangura 2008).

With these kinds of tools, religious peacemakers have seen success in resolving complex and longstanding grievances (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). Although white Christians as individuals and institutions in the US in particular have often supported racist policies and doctrines (Tisby 2019), some churches today are trying to better live out their religious values through the creation of multiethnic congregations (DeYmaz 2020, DeYoung, Emerson, and Yancey 2004). Many faith traditions carry pro-social values that could prove helpful in resolving longstanding conflict or healing the devastating injuries of racism (Gopin 2000, 10). Religious leaders and people of faith are able to appeal to "shared religious values and the sense of a higher calling" in their efforts to make peace and reconcile those in conflict, often drawing on religious texts and traditions that are widely supported by those in their faith tradition (Marsden 2012, 5). This history and literature provide hope for a positive role for religion in racial justice work, but are religious leaders and congregations picking up the tools of religion to do the work of racial justice?

People of faith have used religious resources to engage racial justice work in the United States, in both the past and the present. For instance, Reverend Myra Brown talks about how the true work of religion is the work of social justice, saying "we must work tirelessly to end racism where we live…We must open ourselves to others' pain, speak out against injustice, and construct the future in which we want to live" (Brown 2019, 45). In the context of longstanding racial strife and division, some religious leaders have spoken of racial reconciliation, bringing a religious concept to the conversation on race.

Foster (2020) uses a common definition of reconciliation as an "ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance, and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God's original intention for all creation to flourish" (p. 67) but notes how it may be problematic when it comes to race. Using this definition, one can see how the spiritual concept of reconciliation can be used to address the social and political problem of racism, but Foster argues the racial rift that has been created and needs reconciling comes as a result of the actions of white people, and so perhaps the forgiveness part of the concept should come later. Religious leaders like Dr. William Boyce advocate for a theology of racial reconciliation rooted both in a scriptural and doctrinal understanding of reconciliation in spiritual terms, as well as more concrete actions towards congregational diversity (Boyce 2020).

Other scholars argue that the reconciliation frame is likely to be used by religious people who are more comfortable with individual-level change and don't want to agitate for the kinds of broader actions that might have more meaningful impacts of the lives of Black and brown people (Oyakawa 2019). Goldberg and Blancke (2011) argue that religion can be most helpful in conflict resolution when the beliefs and motivations of all parties are disclosed, something which takes a great deal of self-reflection and self-knowledge, and which can be challenging.

It is clear that one cannot simply add faith to broader societal conversations about race, stir, and expect positive change. When the damage of racism was so strongly present in the summer of 2020, we know that some congregations sought to use their faith to counter racism and seek to correct and even heal that damage. This research takes a multimethod approach to look closely at race and faith in one Southern city—Little Rock, Arkansas—to better understand how religious communities were using their faith to engage with the topic of race and how they might do so in a positive way going forward.

Methods

This research seeks to understand the role that places of worship can and do play in racial justice and reconciliation through a multimethod approach. Collecting data through multiple forms, across two years, we are able to more fully understand the ways that places of worship use religion to engage with the complexities of race in Little Rock. The city of Little Rock presents a particularly rich context for this study. The 1957 Central High School integration crisis provides the historical background for a city that remains, in many ways, divided by race, while also highly religious.[1] Faith and race thus have a historic relationship in the city, with congregations taking sides on the integration crisis in the 1950's (Campbell and Pettigrew 1959) and, in more recent years, faith leaders collaborating to address race relations, issue reports (Driskill and Camp 2006), and engage in service and relationship building efforts across Black and white congregations (Driskill, Arjannikova, and Meyer 2014, Driskill, Meyer, and Mirivel 2012).

[1] About 50% of the population of Little Rock is ethnically non-Hispanic white and about 42% of the city is ethnically Black or African-American (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). Little Rock is the capital city of Arkansas, which is located in the Bible Belt of the United States, and is where, for instance 77% of people are absolutely certain of their belief in God, compared to 54% in California.

The data in the following analyses were gathered through five separate data collection efforts. First, in the fall of 2020, 35 diverse congregations were invited to participate in a survey of their members. This survey was part of a larger, longitudinal, community-based research project, the Little Rock Congregations Study (LRCS), which periodically surveys Little Rock clergy and congregations. These 35 congregations were drawn from the full sample of 364 congregations within the city limits of Little Rock, Arkansas, based on their representativeness, their participation in prior iterations of a longitudinal research project, and their willingness to participate in the 2020 wave. See Table A1 for a breakdown of participating congregations by religious tradition, along with the total respondent n for each religious tradition. Electronic surveys were distributed to all members of each congregation by the congregation leaders during the month of October, 2020. Paper surveys and postage-paid envelopes were also distributed to congregations who requested them for older members or for those without Internet access. A total of 2,293 responses were collected across all 35 congregations. The surveys included questions about community engagement, race relations, and issue priorities. A list of questions and summary statistics relevant to the analysis here are available in Table A2.

Second, in order to analyze the content of the sermons that were delivered in the summer of 2020, 15 congregations were purposefully selected to create a sample diverse in race, religious tradition, geographic location, and size. Descriptions of the congregations and their characteristics are summarized in Table A3. Although our congregation selection for other portions of the research included non-Christian congregations, the sermon analysis focused only on Black Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, and Mainline Protestant Christian churches to make the comparative content analysis as similar as possible.

Each of the selected congregations had a website with archived sermon content or a YouTube channel where past sermons could be viewed. A sample of sermons from each Sunday for

the six weeks following the murder of George Floyd was selected. With six sermons selected per congregation, across the 15 congregations, a total of 90 sermons were analyzed. The sermons for each congregation were pooled and coded for a number of key variables, six of which are used in the analysis here: (1) a binary variable for whether or not George Floyd was mentioned, and count variables (0-10) for mentions of (2) race, (3) a religious call to action, (4) a political call to action, (5) anti-racist work framed as personal effort, and (6) anti-racist work framed as collective effort. For the sermons in some congregations, the count variables were mentioned more than 10 times over the course of the six sermons, but we maxed out the count variables at 10 to reduce the influence of outliers. The sermons were coded by a single graduate student, who recoded a random sample of 10% of sermons to establish reliability at 99% agreement and Cohen's Kappa of 0.93. The codebook used to code the sermons is available in Appendix A1.

Third, a purposeful sample of clergy leaders was contacted in the fall of 2021 for interviews about the efforts of their congregations on the topic of race. A total of 35 congregations were selected for these interviews, a sample which was based on the researchers' personal knowledge of race relations efforts in the community, on previous interviews, and on Google searches of Little Rock congregations that are active on issues of race. Of these 35 sampled congregations, 21 interviews were ultimately completed, for a response rate of 60%. A breakdown of the interviewed clergy by religious tradition is available in Table A4. The interviews asked clergy about the kinds of programs they were undertaking with regard to race, including whether those programs were formal or informal. The clergy interviews were conducted by four members of the Little Rock Congregations Study research team (three faculty and one graduate student). Intercoder reliability was established through repeated rounds of team coding by three team members and codebook refining, until average pairwise coding agreement reached 97% and Krippendorff's Alpha 0.86. This codebook is available in Appendix A2.

Fourth, our research team also interviewed seven national leaders who are prominently engaged in faith-based racial justice and reconciliation work. We identified these experts through our personal knowledge of their work, books they authored, nonprofit organizations they lead, and Internet searches that led to their work. We were able to gain access to such prominent experts because of a small grant from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, which enabled us to pay them each an honorarium for the interview. Experts were also selected for balance on gender (four women and three men) and race (two white and five Black interviewees). The full interview protocol is included in Appendix A3.

These seven interviews were team coded by three graduate students. All three students worked together to develop the codebook and code each interview, until unanimous agreement among all coders was reached on each assigned code (this level of intercoder reliability was possible because of the small number of interviews). This codebook is available in Appendix A4. The goal of these interviews was to learn about national efforts in the field of faith-based racial justice and reconciliation and to develop models for such work that our team could share with the community. The three models we developed, based on these interviews and on the literature, are presented in Appendix A5.

Using the models developed in the fourth stage of data collection, in our fifth data collection effort, we conducted focus groups with congregations in the Little Rock community in April and May, 2022. We held six focus groups, lasting about 90 minutes each, with one Muslim, one Baha'i, one Black Protestant, one Evangelical, and two Mainline Protestant congregations. The focus groups were made up of an average of four members each. Held over Zoom, in each focus group we described the three models of faith-based racial justice and reconciliation in turn, and then asked for feedback and discussion. This qualitative feedback on the models provides on-the-ground input on what kinds of approaches might work best for congregations in Little Rock.

To summarize, in order to understand how congregations are using religion to engage with racial justice work, we gathered data through five different efforts:

1. A survey of 2,293 congregants across 35 Little Rock congregations in October, 2020.
2. A content analysis of 90 sermons from 15 Little Rock congregations in the six weeks following the murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020.
3. Interviews with 21 Little Rock congregation leaders in the fall of 2021.
4. Interviews with seven national leaders in the field of faith-based racial justice and reconciliation in the fall of 2021.
5. Six focus groups with Little Rock congregations in the spring of 2022.

Our analysis of these data follows in the results section below, with each section's results corresponding to the number of the data collection effort listed above.

Results

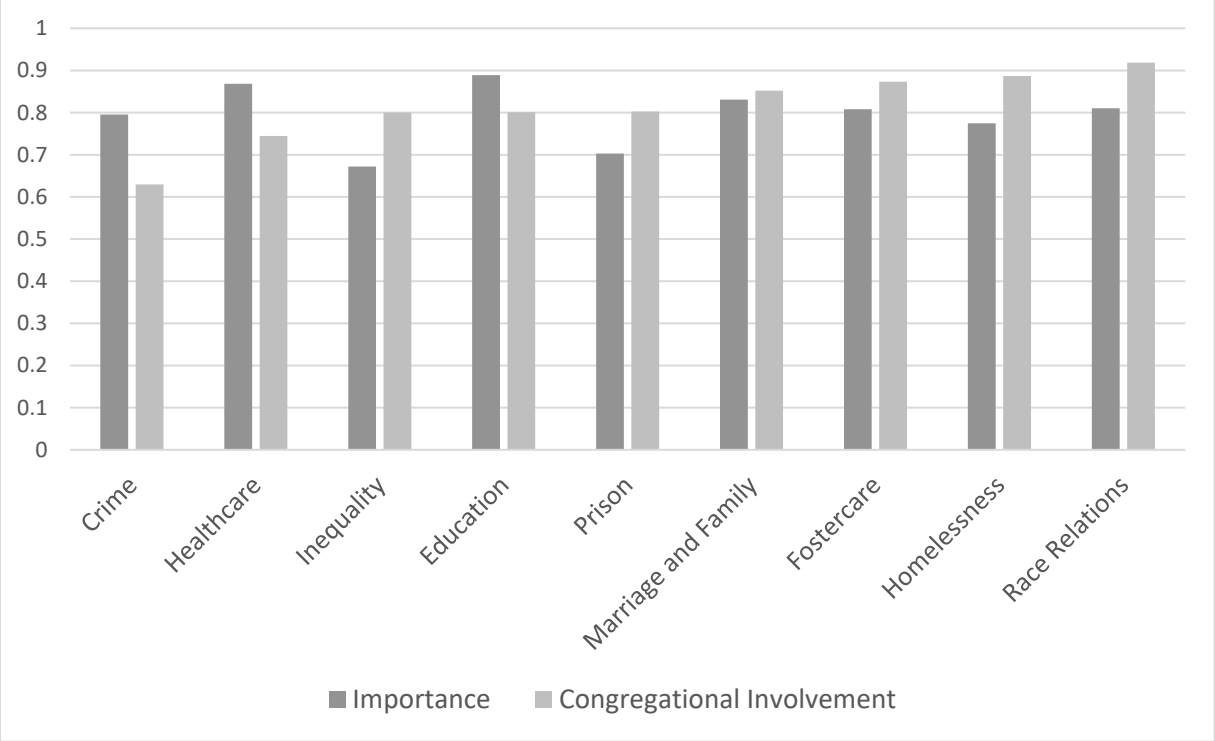
Collecting diverse types of data across time and different populations allows us to see a rich picture of faith-based racial justice efforts in Little Rock—what congregation members want to see from their places of worship, what clergy were saying in the most racially fraught days after the murder of George Floyd, how racial justice efforts have developed over the past two years, what experts recommend, and what local congregations think of the models our team has put together. We present the results of our analyses in the following sections.

1. Congregant Survey Data

We asked congregation members a number of questions about race. Most relevant for our analyses here, we included "race relations" as one of a series of community issues that respondents could rank in importance (along with healthcare, crime, education, etc.). For each issue that respondents ranked as "very important" they received a follow up question asking them if this is an issue that they would like to see their congregation be active in helping to address, with response options of

yes (2), no (0), and maybe (1). The mean values for each community issue, including race relations, on importance and on desire for congregational involvement are presented in Figure 1. In Figure 1, the values for both measures have been normalized to run from 0 to 1, for ease of comparison.

Figure 1. Respondent-reported Importance and Desire for Congregational Involvement, by Community Issue



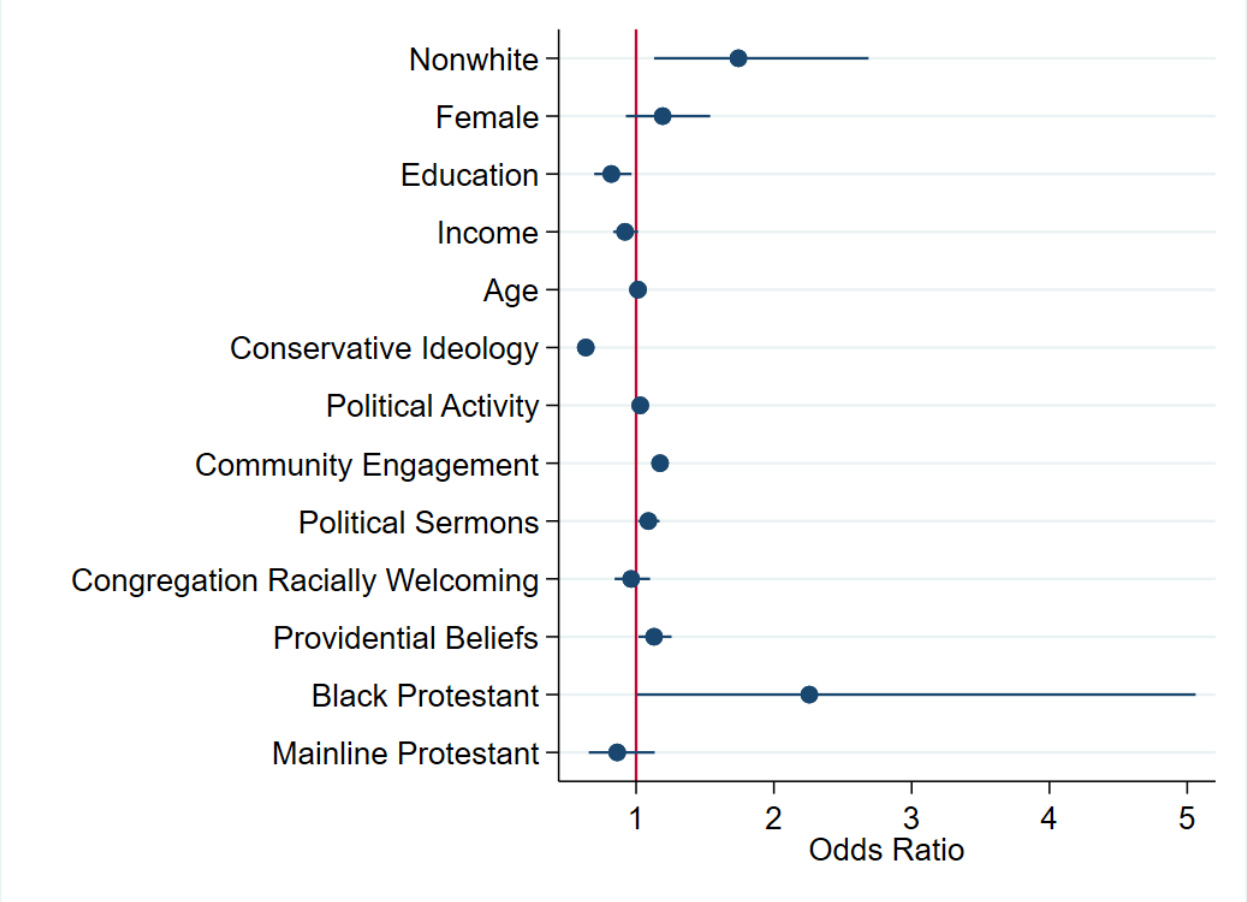
What Figure 1 shows is that race relations is an important issue to the respondents in this sample. It ranks 4th in importance, out of 9 issues, with 48% percent of respondents ranking it as a very important issue. But, more than any other issue, race relations is the one that respondents want to see their congregation actively engaged in helping to address. Eighty-six percent of those who received the follow-up question about whether they would like to see their congregation get involved in helping to address the issue of race relations responded yes; only 2% responded no.

We think this is a meaningful finding because it tells us that respondents see race as within the domain of religion. Whereas crime, for instance, might be an issue that matters to many people in our sample, they don't see it as an issue that their place of worship should be trying to solve. Race relations, on the other hand, is one where congregants do think their place of worship has a role to play, a theme which we will see emerge even more clearly in the qualitative data to come. Table A5 shows a breakdown in prioritizing race and in a desire for engagement on the issue of race relations by religious tradition, indicating racial and denominational differences in these two behaviors. One interesting finding that this table in particular reveals is that Black Protestant congregations are the most likely to say that race relations is an important issue, but the least likely to say that they want to get involved in helping to solve it. As the interview and focus group data will reveal later, this may be due to a sense of exhaustion from Black people in working on this topic, and especially in educating white people.

We can look more closely at those congregants who say that race is a very important issue and those who want to see their congregations involved in addressing race relations through ordered logit models. The results of the first of these models, predicting prioritizing race relations as an important community issue, are displayed in Figure 2 (full model results are in Table A6).

These results show, perhaps unsurprisingly, that race matters for how important respondents believe race relations is as a community issue. Both nonwhite congregants and those attending Black Protestant congregations are more likely to say this issue is important. We also see that politics come into play in a big way, with those that are more ideologically conservative significantly less likely to prioritize race relations. Importantly, those who are more politically active ($p=0.06$) and those who report hearing political sermons at their place of worship are more likely to prioritize the issue of race relations. We also find that more educated people prioritize race relations more and, somewhat surprisingly, so do older people.

Figure 2. Results of Ologit Model Predicting Prioritizing Race Relations as a Community Issue

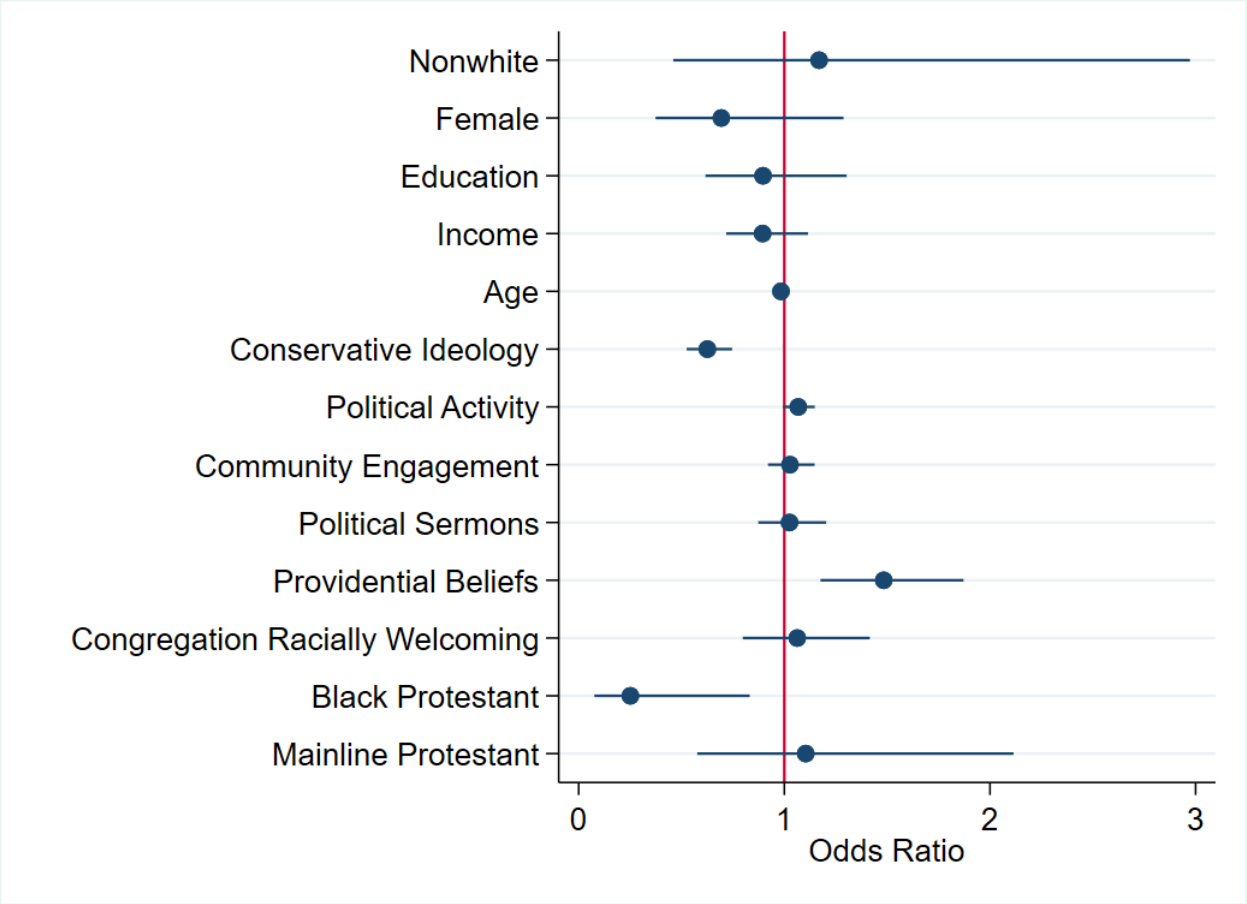


Because the surveyed population is religious, we also included some religion variables in the model. We find that those who say that their congregation makes a special effort to be welcoming to those of other races are not more likely to prioritize race relations, whereas those who believe that God has a plan that they can help carry out, known as providential believers (Glazier 2017), are more likely to say that race relations is an important issue.

Saying that race is an important issue is one thing, but do congregants want their place of worship to get involved in the topic? The results of the ordered logit models predicting the respondent's desire for their congregation to engage in action on race relations are presented in Figure 3 (full model results are in Table A7). Recall that for this model, only those who said that race relations is a very important issue are included, because they are the only ones who received the

follow up question about congregational engagement. These results show that, once again race, politics, and religion rise to the top in helping us understand how people are responding to the issue of race relations.

Figure 3. Results of Ologit Model Predicting Respondent's Desire for their Congregation to be Active on the Issue of Race Relations



When it comes to our respondents wanting their congregation to engage the issue of race, those who are more conservative tend to shy away from the issue, Black Protestant congregations are also less likely to want to engage, likely due to exhaustion or burn out, and people who hold providential religious beliefs—those who believe that God has a plan that they can help carry out—are more likely to want to engage in work on race. This is something we have seen among religiously

motivated peacemakers in conflict zones around the world. Believing in a plan and a power greater than yourself often keeps peacemakers working through very difficult circumstances (Glazier 2018) . We may see something similar happening among those who choose to engage in faith-based racial justice work in the South.

We can conclude from these quantitative survey data that, from the 2,293 respondents at the 35 surveyed congregations in Little Rock, race relations matter and places of worship are seen as important, safe spaces to talk about what can be challenging issues related to race. Additionally, white and Black congregations are in very different places when it comes to engaging on this issue. As later data will indicate, many Black churches and Black members are exhausted from traumatizing events and conversations. White congregations may be interested in taking action on the issue of race but may not know how to move forward. Here, clergy can be key leaders for conversations and progress. Our next data collection effort looks at how clergy were talking about race in the summer of 2020.

2. *Clergy Sermon Data from the Summer of 2020*

In the summer of 2020, race relations were on the minds and lips of many people in America. The killing of George Floyd at the hands of police officers, shared on viral video, sparked both individual outrage and collective protest. But how did religious leaders use their faith to address this specific murder and the broader question of racial justice and reconciliation during this particularly challenging time?

Analysis of 90 sermons from 15 diverse Christian congregations in Little Rock in the six weeks following the murder of George Floyd show that the response was not uniform. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 1. One key distinction is between how often majority white and majority non-white congregations talked about race during this time. In the six weeks after the murder of George Floyd, the 10 majority white congregations in the sample mentioned race an

average of 3.6 times in their sermons, with one congregation making no mention of race at all. (As a side note: The average mention drops to 2.8 when we remove one majority white church that has emphasized addressing racism as a central value in their church and maxed out race mentions at 10.) On the other hand, the five majority nonwhite congregations (four Black Protestant churches and one multiethnic church) mentioned race an average of 7.4 times in their sermons across these six weeks. Majority nonwhite congregations in Little Rock were talking about race a lot more than majority white congregations. Additionally, every majority nonwhite congregation in the sample explicitly mentioned George Floyd by name, whereas 3 of the 10 majority white congregations did not say his name.

Table 1. Comparing the Sermons of White and Nonwhite Churches in Little Rock in the Six Weeks after the Murder of George Floyd

	Average Race Mentions	Percent of Congregations Mentioning Floyd by Name	Average Religious Calls to Action	Average Political Calls to Action	Average Personal Frames	Average Collective Frames
White (n=10)	3.6	70%	5.6	3.0	4.5	4.4
Nonwhite (n=5)	7.4	100%	8.2	6.0	6.6	7.6

Note: Six weeks of sermons were analyzed from each of the 15 congregations following the murder of George Floyd on Monday, May 25, 2020. Total sermons n=90.

The way that race was discussed in these congregations differed as well, although there were some key similarities. For instance, both the majority white and the majority nonwhite congregations heard sermons with calls to action on racism and in both, these calls were more likely to be framed in religious than in political terms. For instance, in one Black Protestant congregation, you could hear the sorrow in the sermon and the solution clearly put forward as a religious one: "Lord, Your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Quite honestly, given the emotions and frustrations of this week, we need a word from you." The connection between spiritual strength and racial oppression was also clear in this sermon from a multiethnic church:

> "Before our God verse 11 [in Revelation, Chapter 12] they have overcome [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony. I believe that we as a country are overcoming right now. It's not only about blood, it's the blood that has been shed by the people. Brianna Taylor, George Floyd—that's a catalyst we can only truly overcome by the blood Jesus Christ shed on the cross."

Political calls to action were less common. Majority nonwhite congregations heard an average of 8.2 religious calls to action and 6 political calls to action during this time, whereas majority white congregations heard an average of 5.6 religious calls to action and 3 political calls to action. One example of a political call to action is this sermon from a Black Protestant church,

> "And so, it's our job to continue to work with, to stand up for, and to speak up for those who are marginalized. We do that with our voices, and most importantly, church, we do that with our votes. And this fire that we feel, our flame, our passion, at the ballot box to elect people who will represent us in the highest offices, locally and nationally, to ensure that justice is done going forward."

One key difference in framing is in how the clergy talked about whether the work of addressing racism was work that needed to be done on a personal level or work that needed to be done as a collective. For instance, this sermon from a Black Protestant church emphasized the importance of collective work:

> "When you watch what's taking place, you watch all different ethnicities joining force for change. And when you get everybody working together to make a difference, man, then God will begin to make the difference… God says he needs everybody to stand. Everybody needs to unite. Everybody needs to pray, everybody needs to get on their knees, everybody's heart needs to turn back to him so that he can begin to heal our labor."

A similar message is heard in this sermon from a white Evangelical congregation:

> "We feel as though our calling is to be God's people. At this time and place we live out this calling in community as we seek to share life together we hope to celebrate our diversity while focusing on the core of our faith which binds us together as the Body of Christ we believe church should be a foretaste of the Kingdom of God and an outpost of Christian community and work."

Majority nonwhite congregations heard sermons that were more likely to emphasize collective action (an average of 7.6 mentions), compared to individual action (an average of 6.6 mentions). The messages were more balanced in majority white congregations, with sermons containing an average of 4.5 mentions of individual action for every 4.4 mentions of collective action. Sermons that emphasized individual action might sound like this one, from a multiethnic church,

> "Jesus not only taught us how to be anti-racist, he lived it, he demonstrated it, and he confronted it head-on and that's what this verse is talking about. Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which Jesus walked . . . we are not only to say it, but we should teach it, not only teach it, but live it."

During the summer of 2020, many congregations in Little Rock—Black, white, and multiethnic—were talking about race. These discussions ranged from Black clergy leaders drawing on scriptural symbolism, to white clergy leaders calling for compassion, to white clergy leaders condemning racial protests with no mention of George Floyd. This background helps us better understand the next set of data: interviews with Little Rock clergy about their race relations efforts.

3. Clergy Interview Data

In the fall of 2021, our research team interviewed 21 clergy leaders from diverse congregations in Little Rock on the ways that their congregations were engaging with the topic of race relations. Table 2 contains an exhaustive list of the types of formal programs clergy mentioned to us in the

interviews. From book clubs to podcasts to sermon series, congregations in Little Rock found many ways to engage with the topic of race.

We found some clear differences in how clergy talked about race, however, which are summarized in Table 3. For some, advocating for racial justice was a central value of their faith. More than half of our clergy expressed that sentiment (14 of the 21, and about equally likely for it be mentioned by white clergy as by nonwhite, 1.37 to 1.38). For instance, one clergy member said "race is always an underlying part of whatever program we are doing, whatever outreach we are doing." Another told us "we believe [racist systems and structures] are breaking God's heart and so we are seeking to live in a different way." One leader said "my convictions about racial justice are intrinsic to my faith. I don't know how to separate those."

Table 2. List of Formal Race Relations Efforts Mentioned by Little Rock Clergy in Interviews

Formal Program Mentioned
Attend rally
Book studies
Discussion Groups
Guest speakers
Hiring more diverse leadership
Issue formal statements
Joint worship services
Listen to or host podcasts
Meet with other pastors
Meetings
Multi-week seminar
Outreach to diversify congregation makeup
Partner with local organizations or congregations
Research history of own church
Special sermon series
Talks around MLK Day, George Floyd, Black History Month
Watch movies
Workshops

Another way that we saw the connection between faith and race was when clergy members would bring up religious texts to explain why faith-based racial justice work was so important to them and their congregation. In 20 of the 21 interviews, clergy mentioned stories from scripture or explicit scripture references. As one example, one clergy member referenced the Exodus story of Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt as a parallel for the deliverance of those who are currently oppressed today. Three clergy leaders explicitly referred to the Apostle Paul creating multiethnic churches as a model for what clergy should be doing. One said, "we see in the book of Acts that the Spirit of God can tear down all of those cultural barriers that we have placed up and allow us to see that we're probably not as different as we like to think."

Five clergy used the specific phrase "image of God" in referring to how all people should be treated with dignity and respect. As one pastor put it, "when you begin to make a hierarchy of races, that is an affront to the image of God in all people." This clergy leader went on to say, "that is how I like to frame racism and racial justice, the redemptive work of that is to recover the image of God in all people or a better way of saying it is to recover our ability to see the image of God in all people." Another clergy leader from a different faith tradition similarly said, "We are all made in the image of God, and if that's the case and if we believe that which we believe, then it doesn't matter what color you are."

Just as with the sermons from the summer of 2020, we also saw racial differences in the clergy interview data. Eight of the 21 clergy who were interviewed were nonwhite. On average, congregations led by white clergy were about as likely to say that they had specific programs on race as congregations led by nonwhite clergy (3.3 mentions, compared to 3.8 mentions), but the eight nonwhite clergy were much more likely to talk about scripture in their interview. The nonwhite clergy made an average of 9.4 general or specific scripture references in their interviews, compared to an average of 4.4. for the white clergy.

Table 3. Quantitative Clergy Interview Data, by Race

	Anti-Racism is a Central Value of the Faith	**Centers Racial Justice Efforts in Scripture**	**Have Formal Program to Address Race**
Average Mentions for White Clergy (n=13)	1.37	4.4	3.3
Average Mentions for Nonwhite Clergy (n=8)	1.38	9.4	3.8
Number of Clergy that Mentioned (total n=21)	14	20	20

Every single nonwhite clergy member made multiple references to holy scripture in talking about racial justice, sometimes expounding on particular passages or stories at length. Some white clergy did the same, but it was more often the case that scripture references were made in passing. For instance, one white clergy leader said, "You know, Jesus he crossed a lot of lines: Jew, Gentile, male, female. There's a lot of different things that he did in his ministry to include people." In contrast, a Black clergy leader went into an in-depth discussion of the story of the Good Samaritan, explained how "Jesus recalibrates the Jewish understanding of neighbor" because, "along comes this person that's hated who helps this person, and not only helps them but pays their bill at the end and goes above and beyond. That's what neighboring looks like, Jesus says. You make yourself uncomfortable." This is what the qualitative data show us—the difference in how the religious heart of racial justice is ingrained in faith for some clergy.

Four of the 20 congregations represented by the clergy interview subjects are Black Protestant congregations. These congregations were not the most likely to host programs related to race at the time of our interviews (reporting an average of 1.75 specific programs per congregation). Instead, it was Mainline Protestant congregations, led by mostly white clergy leaders, who were most likely to have formal programs addressing issues of race (reporting an average of four programs per

congregation, of the type listed in Table 2). We saw real sincerity in our interviews as these clergy expressed their desire to do something to combat racism and to help their congregations address the challenging issues of the day. For instance, in this clergy interview, "I will say we're trying real hard but we're still a very affluent, predominantly white congregation. I would not want to project the idea that we feel like we've got it figured out, because we really, really don't, but I think we're starting to think about some things that are important to move forward." Other clergy members felt overwhelmed and like they weren't doing enough. In speaking about past racial divisions, denominational segregation, and harm, one said, "in terms of our own denomination that is still white, […] there is a need for repentance."

Our interview data, combined with survey and sermon analysis, makes it clear that race matters both to congregants and faith leaders. Even so, it can be hard for clergy leaders, most of whom have not received formal racial justice training, to help their members grapple with difficult questions of racial harm and trauma, especially in a city like Little Rock with a checkered racial past that is very much still dealing with racial trauma today (Carroll 2020, Campbell and Pettigrew 1959). Our next phase of research focused on what is being done or could be done to provide options for faith leaders to address race relations.

4. *Expert Interview Data*

In this next stage of the project, our research team conducted interviews with seven national leaders who are active in the work of faith-based racial justice and reconciliation. These interviews enabled our research team to learn about current work being done on the cutting edge of faith-based racial justice. The seven interviews, which ranged in length from 30 to 45 minutes, were conducted and coded by three graduate students. The interview subjects were three men and four women, all from Christian religious traditions, two of whom were white and five of whom were Black. Despite the

diverse subject pool and relatively small sample size, a few common themes emerged from the interviews.

For instance, every interview subject but one mentioned the importance of talking about historical trauma. One spoke in very concrete terms about how doing so can help people move forward, saying:

> "Let's come talk about 1958. What happened when the interstate got built? What happened to your neighbor? What happened to his business? And really try and be concrete about our shared history. I've found that when we can do that, talk about the shared history, that we all have been affected by in different ways, and we ground the conversation, it's much less likely that folks are going to end up in an abstract fight about concepts that don't really get us anywhere."

Another expert remarked that, when we talk about race and faith, "I don't think we're talking about some of the harm that people have experienced, physically, spiritually, emotionally, when they've encountered racism, particularly in religious spaces."

All but one of the expert interview subjects also mentioned the importance of white people in particular acknowledging racism and taking responsibility for their privilege and their roles in a systemically racist society. One Black expert said it very forcefully with this quote

> "So, the way whiteness works is a white person in a white-centered society hardly ever thinks about their whiteness. They think about themselves as individuals. I'm just John, I'm just Jane, whatever it might be. And I only represent myself, whereas a Black person for instance, understands that wherever she or he goes, they are being considered as part of a group. As part of 'Black people' writ large and not just as individuals."

One of our white experts was sensitive to how this message might be received by white congregants, or white people in society more broadly, saying,

> "we have to talk about why people are aggrieved, but this isn't about a politics of resentment, or you're bad because you're white. And, so, we want you to come like be willing to get beat up. I think that's kind of what people think right now. It's like, no, we are all literally in this together. And if histories of inequity that yeah, I didn't create them, but if they're still alive in my community, ultimately, yes, it hurts my neighbor. But what's hurting my neighbor ends up hurting me and my family, too."

One Black expert sounded a bit exhausted, saying: "it's a lot of work for Black churches to help white people understand."

Models of Faith-based Racial Justice and Reconciliation for Congregations

Based on the data collected from these expert interviews, and from a close review of the literature, our research team put together three potential models that congregations could use in pursuing faith-based racial justice and reconciliation. Summaries of the three models, prepared for distribution in the community, are available in Appendix 5.

The first model, which we call "The Friendship Model," puts an emphasis on developing relationships across racial lines, listening to people who have different backgrounds, and fostering authentic connections. This model builds on a book called, "The Friendship Challenge: A Six-Week Guide to True Reconciliation—One Friendship at a Time" by Senator Tim Scott and Congressman Trey Gowdy (2018). We see recommendations for this model in quotes like this one from one of our expert interviews, "What I think helps people turn the corner is two things. One, it's a personal relationship. So, for people who are so entrenched in individualism, it often takes an individual relationship to awaken them to broader systemic issues." Pieces of this model were recommended by another expert, who said that friendships were actually more likely to develop when people from different racial backgrounds were working on justice issues together: "if you build [collaboration]

into the structure, so that folks can do the justice work together, sometimes then friendship results from that."

The second model is what we call "The Scripture Model." In this model, congregants are encouraged to engage with the sacred texts of their religious tradition with new eyes. Traditional religious messages, like the Exodus of the Israelites out of the Egypt or the parable of the Good Samaritan, are retold with an anti-racist lens to help congregants see that their faith tradition has racial justice in its roots. As one expert said, "In the Bible, the core teaching is really a story about human dignity and love of neighbor. And so walking people through that I think is really important." In one interview, a white female pastor and activist gave an example of this model, saying, "Exodus is the cornerstone…the story of resisting oppression, authoritarianism, slavery. And then Jesus is portrayed in the Gospels as a kind of a new Moses and a liberator…the Old and New Testaments, they echo one another, they build on one another, and they're intrinsically linked."

The third and final model that our team developed is what we call "The Racial Audit Model." In this model, congregations first look at their own past, their own internal documents, and their own action (or inaction) on issues of race. Looking inward and auditing themselves thus lays the groundwork for future racial justice work, but this internal work must come first. Jemar Tisby's book "The Color of Compromise" (2019) lays bare the role of the white Christian church in racism in America and may help congregations seeking to understand their own history better. Our research team was able to interview Tisby and he shared that by confronting this past history and seeking to engage in awareness, relationships, and commitment to racial justice, "it will force, in a positive way, churches to think about their communities and how they can be an active part of creating a more just and equitable system to prevent harm to the most vulnerable in their communities. It's a way of loving neighbors."

We shared the three models we developed with our community partner, the Race Under Grace project of the CityChurch Network in Little Rock, and held six focus groups with diverse congregations. The feedback we received enabled us to created resources we can share more broadly with faith leaders and congregation members seeking a faith-based path forward for racial progress.

5. Focus Group Data

We conducted six focus groups in April and May, 2022. The focus groups took place via Zoom with a diverse collection of Little Rock congregations, including one Muslim, one Baha'i, one Black Protestant, one Evangelical, and two Mainline Protestant congregations. The average focus group size was four congregation members. During the focus groups, which lasted about 90 minutes each, the congregation members were presented with each model in turn, asked about the strengths and the weaknesses of each model, and then asked to a give an overall assessment at the end about which model might work best for their congregation.

The universal consensus across our focus groups was that none of the models could stand alone. Some of the groups thought that the Racial Audit needed to come first, whereas others thought that Friendship model needed to come first, but none of them thought that a single model could do the needed work by itself. One focus group participant said, "I see all of these as really pieces of the same efforts and necessary pieces that need to go together."

Using the feedback from the focus groups and from our community partner, our research team created a number of resources on faith-based racial justice and reconciliation to share with congregations and religious leaders. First, we created infographic summaries of each of the three models we developed. Together with these infographic summaries we included short descriptions, steps to take, questions to ask, and suggestions for further reading. We view these as first step documents for congregations seeking to engage in faith-based racial justice and reconciliation work using these models. Second, we created a document with suggestions for congregation leaders who

are interested in engaging in racial justice work. These guideposts can help leaders and members keep the big picture in mind as they do what can be challenging work. Third, we created a document for congregations who may be on the fence about racial justice work. It contains a few statistics and faith-based arguments in favor of religious engagement in racial justice. All of these resources are available on our project website and in the Appendix.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Places of worship have a lot of potential to lead people of faith and their broader communities when it comes to making progress on race relations. Our research shows that people of faith want to talk about race and see their congregation as a safe space to do so. As our country and communities continue to struggle with the realities of racism, places of worship and religious leaders can help heal divisions, urge people to action, and call individuals and institutions to repentance.

The data we collected from clergy sermons and interviews shows that some clergy have been using the tools of their faith to do just that over the last couple of years. This can be challenging work, but it is work that some clergy leaders are very committed to. As one pastor said in an interview with our research team, "everybody likes Jesus until Jesus calls you to do hard things, but the real Jesus always calls you to do hard things, and this is just one of those things." Another emphasized to us just how important it is that religious leaders act first on addressing racism, saying, "The church as a whole will only progress in terms of race relations to the degree that it's leaders, both formal and informal, have done so in their own lives."

But clergy engaging with the topic of race relations is certainly not uniform, even across a city like Little Rock, which has a long and checkered history with racism and has experienced tensions in recent years (Carroll 2020, Campbell and Pettigrew 1959). Our analysis of sermons in the

summer of 2020 show that some congregations were silent on the topic of race—20% of our sample never said George Floyd's name.

But perhaps one of the most common themes we heard from majority white congregation leaders in our clergy interviews was a desire to engage with the issue of race relations together with a feeling of not knowing where to begin, or not knowing how to do it well. As one of our experts put it, "People don't know how to get involved. They don't know the entry point." Helping congregations find that entry point for faith-based racial justice is one goal of our community-based research. We seek not only to learn as social scientists from the community we live in, but also to return findings of value to that community (Rogers 2009, Wilkins 2011, Glazier and Topping 2021).

Using our knowledge of the literature and our interviews with national leaders, we created three faith-based racial justice and reconciliation models, vetted through congregation focus groups. Faith leaders can choose how best to adapt, mix, and apply these models in their own congregations. Indeed, we would agree with our focus group participants that a combination of all the models is most helpful. As Marti and Emerson (2013) assert, some discourse and practices aimed at addressing race relations tend to "see change as personal and individual" and thus social ills are conquered through "conversion and repentance" with a focus on getting people from different backgrounds "to get along as believers" (183). Training and education must go beyond talk and relationship building to address racial inequalities and structures. We hope that these models, used together, can begin to do that.

The models, along with additional resources, are now available on our project website. Additionally, we met with our Little Rock Clergy Advisory Board, a group of eight clergy members from diverse congregations, who provide advice and input to our research team. At this meeting, held on May 13, 2022, members made recommendations about the resources and how best to distribute them to congregations. With their input, we plan to host a summit on Race and Faith in

fall 2022, where we will bring clergy leaders from across the city together, share these results, distribute the developed resources, and talk about the challenges that our community faces when it comes to race. We hope that by listening to clergy and other community leaders through our Clergy Advisory Board, the Race and Faith Summit, and other forums, we will gain insights into future directions for this research.

Looking ahead to future research, we are interested in testing responses to the three models in a broader population, through a survey experiment. With a larger sample and more rigorous testing, we can evaluate how a less religious population might respond to the three different models, for instance, or how people from different racial backgrounds or faith traditions might respond to them.

How are congregations using the tools of religion to engage questions of race? They are doing so through sermons, by using scripture, in diverse programming, and in ways that vary across religious traditions and race. The rich and diverse data we have presented here indicate that people and places of faith have great potential to facilitate progress on racial justice issues, that congregants are eager to see their places of worship engage with these important issues, and that many clergy leaders are already beginning to do so.

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Appendix for Race and Faith: The Role of Congregations in Racial Justice

Table A1. Congregations Participating in the October 2020 Survey of Members

Religious Tradition	**Participating Congregations**	**Total Respondent N**
Black Protestant	7	102
Evangelical Protestant	9	366
Mainline Protestant	13	971
Catholic	1	607
Muslim	2	61
Jewish	2	85
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	2	101
Total	35	2,293

Table A2. Survey Question Wording and Summary Statistics

Measure	**Question Wording**	**Summary Statistics**
Community Engagement Scale	Summative Measure of Six Questions, coded Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1): • I do things to make the community a better place • I am aware of the important needs in the community • I rarely talk with my friends and/or family about community problems (reverse coded) • Becoming involved in political or social issues is a good way to improve the community • Government is too complicated for me to understand (reverse coded) • I believe that I can personally make a difference in my community	Mean: 23.75 S.D.: 2.95 Min: 6 Max: 30
Little Rock Racial Divide	Little Rock has a problem with racial division, coded Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean: 3.96 S.D.: 0.87 Min: 1 Max: 5
Little Rock Racial Improvement	I think that race relations are likely to improve in Little Rock in the future, coded Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean: 3.52 S.D.: 0.81 Min: 1 Max: 5
Issue Importance	Please indicate how important each of these issues is to you, coded Very important (5), Important (4), Moderately important (3), Slightly important (2), Unimportant (1): • Crime • Race Relations • Access to Healthcare • Education/Schools • Income Inequality • Marriage/Families • Housing/Homelessness • Prison/Criminal Justice • At-risk Children/Foster Care	All variables range from 1 to 5. Crime (Mean: 4.18, S.D: 0.87), Race Relations (Mean: 4.24, S.D: 0.92), Access to Healthcare (Mean: 4.47, S.D: 0.75), Education/Schools (Mean: 4.55, S.D: 0.69), Income Inequality (Mean: 3.68, S.D: 1.16), Marriage/Families (Mean: 4.32, S.D: 0.91), Housing/Homelessness (Mean: 4.09, S.D: 0.87), Prison/Criminal Justice (Mean: 3.81, S.D: 0.97), At-risk Children/Foster Care (Mean: 4.23, S.D: 0.84)

Congregational Issue Involvement	Would you like to see your congregation get involved to help address the issue of [x]? Yes (2), No (0), Maybe (1)	All variables range from 0 to 2. Crime (Mean: 1.26, S.D: 0.69), Race Relations (Mean: 1.83, S.D: 0.42), Access to Healthcare (Mean: 1.49, S.D: 0.69), Education/Schools (Mean: 1.60, S.D: 0.66), Income Inequality (Mean: 1.60, S.D: 0.61), Marriage/Families (Mean: 1.70, S.D: 0.55), Housing/Homelessness (Mean: 1.77, S.D: 0.49), Prison/Criminal Justice (Mean: 1.60, S.D: 0.64), At-risk Children/Foster Care (Mean: 1.74, S.D: 0.52)
Political Activity Scale	Summative Measure of Seven Questions regarding the frequency of various political activities, coded No (1), Yes once or twice (2), Yes a few times (3), Yes many times (4). In the past year, have you: • Tried to persuade someone to vote • Donated money to a political candidate or campaign • Signed a petition • Participated in a local political or community group • Participated in a national political group • Contacted public officials on a political or social issue • Posted or shared something political through social media (like Facebook or Twitter)	Mean: 12.33 S.D.: 4.63 Min: 7 Max: 28
Congregation Racially Welcoming	My congregation makes a deliberate effort to be welcoming to racial and ethic groups that are different from the majority here, Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean: 4.09 S.D.: 0.95 Min: 1 Max: 5
Political Sermons	Combination of responses to the following two questions: How often do the worship service messages by your religious leader: • Focus on advocacy or social action?	Mean: 5.66 S.D.: 1.86 Min: 2 Max: 10

	• Urge you to register to vote? Response options are: Never (1), Seldom (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4), Always (5)	
Providential Beliefs	Combination of responses to the following two questions: • Would you say your religion provides some guidance in your day-to-day life, quite a bit of guidance, or a great deal of guidance in your day-to-day life? Some guidance (2), Quite a bit of guidance (3), A great deal of guidance (4), Religion isn't that important to me (1) • Please mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: God has a plan and I have a part to play in it: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean: 7.99 S.D.: 1.25 Min: 2 Max: 9
Conservative Ideology	Many people use the terms liberal, moderate, and conservative to recognize different political opinions. On a scale from 0 to 6, where 0 is the most liberal position and 6 the most conservative, where would you rank yourself when you think of your general political views?	Mean: 3.21 S.D.: 1.88 Min: 0 Max: 6
Nonwhite	Coded 0 for anyone who responded that their racial or ethnic identity was white and 1 for all others.	86% white 14% nonwhite
Female	Coded 0 for anyone who responded that their gender was male and 1 for anyone who responded that their gender was female. The 7 "other" responses to the gender question were dropped from this variable.	33% male 67% female
Education	What is the highest year in school/degree you have achieved? Less than high school (1), High school/GED (2), Some college/applied degree (3), College graduate (4), Post graduate (5)	Mean: 4.21 S.D.: 0.86 Min: 1 Max: 5
Income	By your best estimate, what was your total household income last year, before taxes? $10,000 or less (1), $10,001 to $20,000 (2), $20,001 to $35,000 (3), $35,001 to $50,000 (4), $50,001 to $100,000 (5), $100,001 to $150,000 (6), more than $150,000 (7)	Mean: 5.42 S.D.: 1.37 Min: 1 Max: 7
Age	2020 minus the year the respondent was born.	Mean: 57.35 S.D.: 15.33 Min: 19 Max: 89
Black Protestant	Respondent is a member of a Black Protestant Congregation	N=102
Mainline Protestant	Respondent is a member of a Mainline Protestant Congregation	N=971

Table A3. Descriptive Information of the 15 Congregations Selected for Sermon Analysis

Religious Tradition	**N**
Black Protestant	4
Evangelical Protestant	7
Mainline Protestant	4
Race/Ethnicity	**N**
White	10
Black	4
Multiethnic	1
Geographic Location	**N**
West Little Rock	4
Downtown	5
Southwest Little Rock	1
Midtown	5
Size	**N**
Less than 150	3
150-400	6
More than 401	6

Table A4. Descriptive Information of the 21 Clergy who Participated in Interviews

Religious Tradition	**N**
Baha'i	2
Black Protestant	4
Evangelical Protestant	5
Mainline Protestant	7
Catholic	1
Islamic	1
Jewish	1
Race/Ethnicity	**N**
White	13
Black	6
Asian	2

Figure 1. Respondent-reported Importance and Desire for Congregational Involvement, by Community Issue

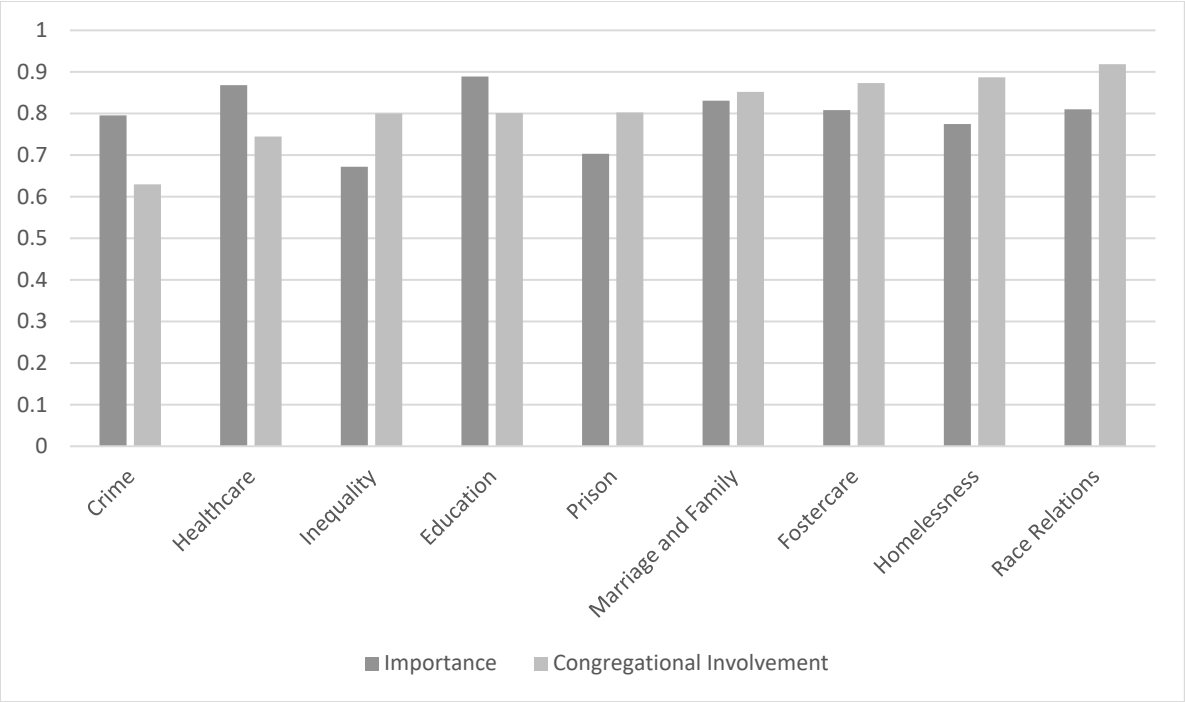

Table A5. Mean Issue Priority of Race Relations and Mean Desire for Engagement on Race Relations, by Religious Tradition

Religious Tradition	Mean Issue Priority of Race Relations (1 to 5)	Mean Desire for Engagement on Race Relations (0 to 2)	Respondent N
Catholic	3.97 (0.05)	1.78 (0.03)	607
Mormon	4.10 (0.11)	1.72 (0.09)	101
Evangelical Protestant	4.21 (0.06)	1.85 (0.03)	366
Total	4.24 (0.91)	1.83 (0.42)	2293
Mainline Protestant	4.33 (0.03)	1.90 (0.01)	971
Jewish	4.52 (0.09)	1.81 (0.07)	85
Islamic	4.56 (0.08)	1.87 (0.06)	61
Black Protestant	4.72 (0.07)	1.57 (0.09)	102

Note: standard deviations are in parentheses

Figure 2. Results of Ologit Model Predicting Prioritizing Race Relations as a Community Issue

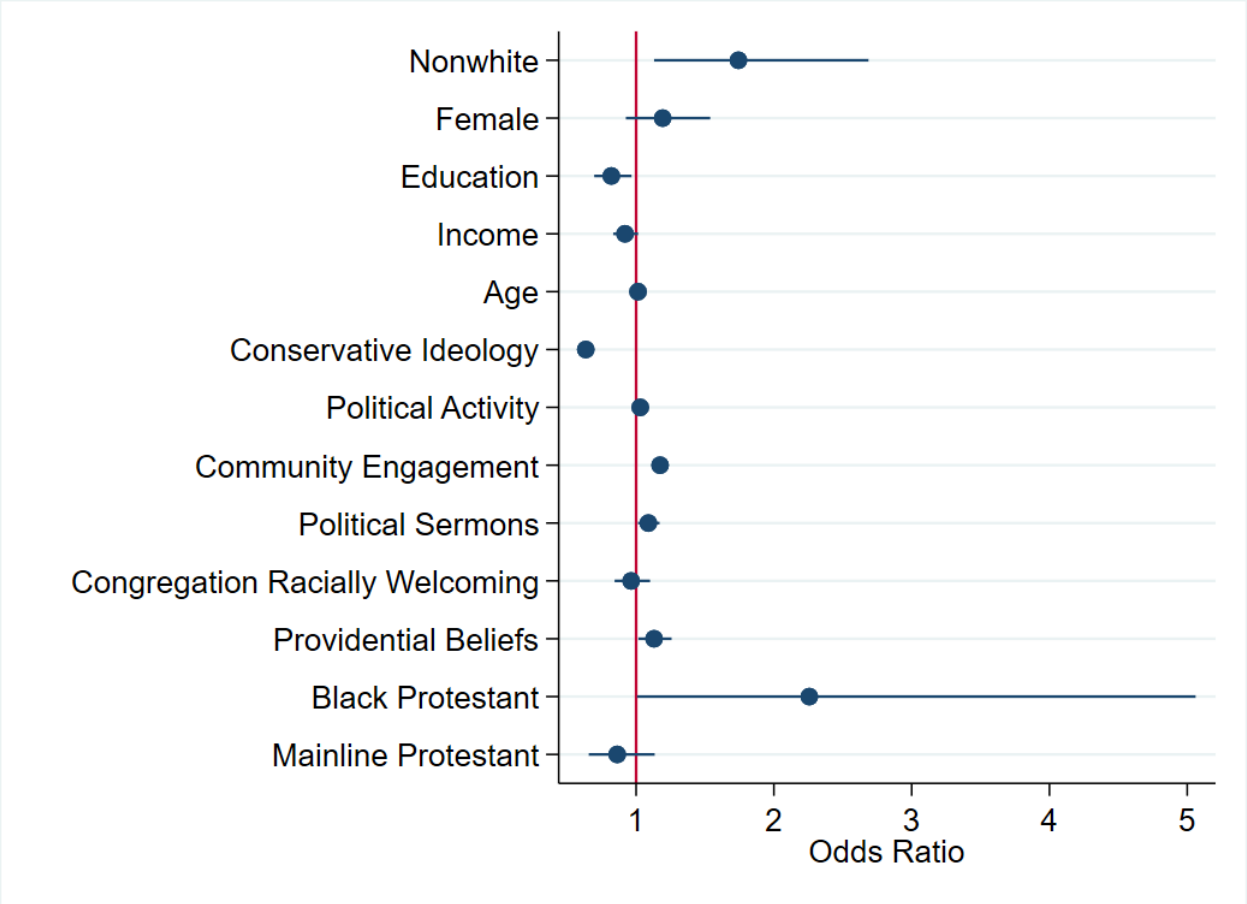

Table A6. Full Model Results for Ologit Predicting Prioritizing Race Relations as a Community Issue

Variable	**Odds Ratio**	**Standard Error**
Nonwhite	1.74**	0.38
Female	1.19	0.16
Education	0.82**	0.06
Income	0.91*	0.04
Age	1.01**	0.00
Conservative Ideology	0.63**	0.27
Political Activity	1.03*	0.01
Community Engagement	1.17**	0.02
Political Sermons	1.08**	0.03
Congregation Racially Welcoming	0.96	0.06
Providential Beliefs	1.13**	0.06
Black Protestant	2.25**	0.92
Mainline Protestant	0.86	0.12
N=1,135		
Pseudo R2=0.13		

**p<0.05, *p<0.1

Figure 3. Results of Ologit Model Predicting Respondent's Desire for their Congregation to be Active on the Issue of Race Relations

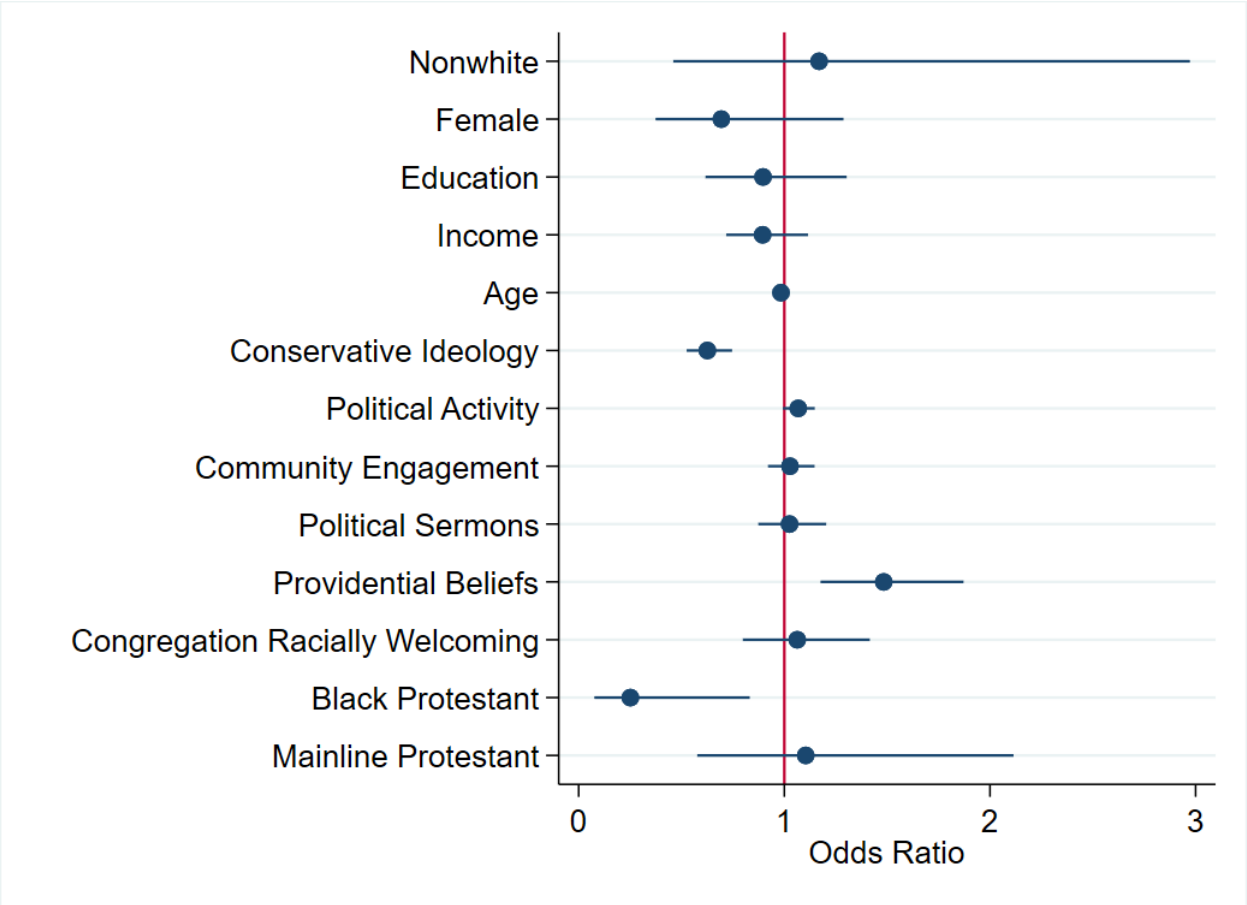

Table A7. Full Model Results for Ologit Predicting Respondent's Desire for their Congregation to be Active on the Issue of Race Relations

Variable	**Odds Ratio**	**Standard Error**
Nonwhite	0.15	0.47
Female	-0.36	0.31
Education	-0.11	0.19
Income	-0.11	0.11
Age	-0.12	0.01
Conservative Ideology	-0.47**	0.09
Political Activity	0.06*	0.03
Community Engagement	0.03	0.05
Political Sermons	0.02	0.08
Congregation Racially Welcoming	0.06	0.14
Providential Beliefs	0.39**	0.12
Black Protestant	-1.38**	0.61
Mainline Protestant	0.09	0.33
N=540		
Pseudo R2=0.13		

**p<0.05, *p<0.1

Table 1. Comparing the Sermons of White and Nonwhite Churches in Little Rock in the Six Weeks after the Murder of George Floyd

	Average Race Mentions	Percent of Congregations Mentioning Floyd by Name	Average Religious Calls to Action	Average Political Calls to Action	Average Personal Frames	Average Collective Frames
White (n=10)	3.6	70%	5.6	3.0	4.5	4.4
Nonwhite (n=5)	7.4	100%	8.2	6.0	6.6	7.6

Note: Six weeks of sermons were analyzed from each of the 15 congregations following the murder of George Floyd on Monday, May 25, 2020. Total sermon n=90.

Table 2. List of Formal Race Relations Efforts Mentioned by Little Rock Clergy in Interviews

Formal Program Mentioned
Attend rally
Book studies
Discussion Groups
Guest speakers
Hiring more diverse leadership
Issue formal statements
Joint worship services
Listen to or host podcasts
Meet with other pastors
Meetings
Multi-week seminar
Outreach to diversify congregation makeup
Partner with local organizations or congregations
Research history of own church
Special sermon series
Talks around MLK Day, George Floyd, Black History Month
Watch movies
Workshops

Table 3. Quantitative Clergy Interview Data, by Race

	Anti-Racism is a Central Value of the Faith	**Centers Racial Justice Efforts in Scripture**	**Have Formal Program to Address Race**
Average Mentions for White Clergy (n=13)	1.37	4.4	3.3
Average Mentions for Nonwhite Clergy (n=8)	1.38	9.4	3.8
Number of Clergy that Mentioned (total n=21)	14	20	20

Appendix A1. Codebook for Sermons on Race After George Floyd

- *Do* they or *don't* they mention race?
    - Count 1 for each mention of race, racism, George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, racial injustice, etc.
- *How* are they talking about it?
    - Do they say George Floyd's name? Code yes for the specific mention of his name.
- *How long* are they talking about it?
    - *Episodic*–George Floyd, specific BLM protest, isolated event
    - *Thematic*–Ongoing societal subjects such as systemic racism, ongoing racial injustice, police brutality as a broader issue
- *What* are they saying to do about it?
    - Do clergy say this is personal/inner work (for each *individual* to do) or work as a *whole* (collective) to do together? Whose responsibility is this work–each person or the church community?
- Is the call to action *religious* (e.g., prayer, spiritual growth) or *political* (e.g., vote, march)?

Appendix A2. Codebook for Interviews on Race with Clergy

- Central Value: Anti-racism is a core value of the congregation.
    - Because race relations is so central, it is likely to come out in all they do. This is very important to the congregation (e.g., this is a value, our vision, we have a long history of, this is really central to who we are, etc.).
        - "We are known for this. This is our mission."
        - Note that central values can't be inferred by what congregations are doing or a reference to scripture. They can only be stated.
        - Use this code sparingly--only when it is explicit.
- Informal Race Relations Efforts: Congregations race relations efforts/engagement is informal.
    - Not a formal program led by the clergy (e.g., we have encouraged conversations; we talk often about).
- Specific Program/Initiative: A specific program or effort is discussed. This is a formal program that has a start/end.
    - Examples include sermon series, reading groups, tour of civil rights sites, etc.
        - Race relations was the primary target
        - Racial justice was a secondary outcome
- Scripture: Clergy member uses holy text (scripture) to explain/justify their racial justice/reconciliation efforts.
    - General: Any time clergy say "Jesus said" or "the Church says" we code it as scripture because scripture is implied.
    - Specific:
        - Formal scripture/story. Verse, chapter, line given (in John 3:16…).
        - Narrative from scripture; more than just a citation or mention (the story of the Good Samaritan teaches…).
        - Image of God references go here (references to being created equal, may reference Genesis or just the creation account).

Appendix A3. Expert Interview Protocol

Best Practices for Faith-Based Racial Justice and Reconciliation

The interview protocol is divided into blocks. The blocks provide an organizing framework and structure for the interview and an initial framework for coding the interviewees responses. The interviews are semi-structured and follow-up questions may slightly deviate from the specific wording used here. The Blocks are organized as follows:

- Block 1 provides an overview of the project and asks for success stories.
- Block 2 focuses on congregations that might be unconvinced about the need to address race.
- Block 3 focuses on what academic research we should be doing in the future.

Elements to cover before beginning the interview

1. Introduction and Overview of project
    a. We are an academic research project seeking to learn more about best practices for how faith communities can engage in conversations about race.
    b. Confidentiality
        i. Review informed consent with them. They need to have signed it electronically before the interview begins.
        ii. You can skip any question that you aren't comfortable answering.
    c. Discuss taping for accuracy
        i. "I would like to record this interview to make sure that I have your response accurately. Is that okay?" Remind them about confidentiality.
        ii. If applicable: [some members] of our research team are also observing/taking notes.
    d. Thank you—always be polite and thankful for their time.

Block 1. Overview of LRCS and Success Stories

2. Background. There has been a lot of discussion around the country about race over the last couple of years. We know that you have done a lot of work in this area. For our research, we have worked on religion and community engagement since 2012, but we want to do more to help congregations make progress on race. Right now, in another part of our research, we are interviewing clergy leaders to learn more about what is happening in congregations in Little Rock. We are interested in learning more about what congregations around the country are doing that is working.
    a. Have you been in contact with or worked with any specific congregations that you feel like are doing racial justice and reconciliation right?
        i. Could you tell us about what specific programs, approaches, or events they are engaged in?

ii. Do you think the leaders of those congregations would be willing to talk with us about their experiences? Would you be willing to connect us?

Block 2. Recommendations for Congregations on the Fence

For some congregations, they are already convinced that racial justice and reconciliation are important work for people of faith to engage in. Others might be more difficult to persuade.

3. What have you found to be the most compelling faith-based arguments for persuading [Christians/Muslims/Buddhists/adjust to the faith tradition that the respondent is speaking from] that engaging in the work of racial justice and reconciliation should be a priority?
    a. What about the move from personal work to policy or structural change? Is this difficult to make? What do you find works best?
4. Do you have any personal experience with congregations that were on the fence and then got involved in racial justice and reconciliation work? How did that turn out?
    a. Do you think the leaders of those congregations would be willing to talk with us about their experiences? Would you be willing to connect us?

Block 3. Research on Race and Religion

We are an academic research project just getting started in this area of race and religion. We know from the data we have collected since 2012 that the issue of race relations has become increasingly important to the clergy in our city. Our 2020 survey also showed that it is the number one issue that people want their congregation to get involved in. It seems like people see their places of worship as safe places to talk about race and as places that should be active in correcting the wrongs of racism.

5. What kind of research do you think needs to be done in the area of race and religion? What would you recommend we look into?
    a. Are there survey or interview questions we should be asking? Are there things we should be looking into for Black vs. white congregations? What should we be studying that we don't know about yet?

Wrapping up

Thank you so much for your time! That is all of the questions that I have. Thinking back over our conversation, is there anything you want to add or clarify?

Thanks again! We are working with a couple of different community organizations, including the Race Under Grace project at the City Church Network and the Social Justice Institute at Philander Smith College, to provide some resources to congregations that are interested in engaging with the topic of race relations. This will be really helpful as we try to create the best possible resources and as we do the academic work of research and writing articles. Thank you!

Appendix A4. Codebook for Expert Interviews

Codes	**Sub-Codes**	**Definition/Characteristics**
Historical Trauma		Identifies historical trauma of racism in/outside of religious institutions
White Identity 101		Defined as: ● Recognition + Acknowledgement of racism ● Responsibility + Accountability of racism ● Privilege in regard to race relations
Internal vs. External Work	Individual Reflection	Argues racial justice work has to begin with looking inward (self-reflection)
	Congregational Activism	Argues racial justice work takes place inside of religious institutions
	Community Empowerment	Argues racial justice work takes place outside of religious institutions
Reference to Scripture		Identifies scriptural argument for racial justice in religious texts