

Showing Up for Racial Justice Building Racial Justice Spiritual Communities

Resource Guide

Thank you for being a part of SURJ's learning project for white people in congregations & spiritual communities to participate in actions for racial justice and deepen learning, experience, and relationships. Together we will share learnings in preparation for a broader SURJ campaign for communities to identify as active Racial Justice spiritual communities.

We are excited to learn together with you! This guide will provide a brief overview of the project and a deeper dive into the basics, including an introduction to SURJ's values, suggestions for actions, a schedule for cohort and support calls, and other resources.

OVERVIEW

GOALS:

- SURJ learns how to support faith/spiritual communities to use the power of faith/spiritual traditions to disrupt, divest from, and dismantle white supremacy (with loving, compassionate fierceness) -- and to build up a new world that is rooted in love, justice, and collective liberation for all.
- Congregations/spiritual communities build capacity to disrupt white supremacy and deepen relationships within/among one another and with SURJ.

What: A 6-9 month learning project for white people in congregations/spiritual communities to participate in actions for racial justice and deepen learning, experience, and relationships. Communities will share learnings with SURJ in preparation for SURJ launching a broad campaign for congregations to identify as active Racial Justice communities.

Who: Congregations/Spiritual Communities around the country who are (or who want to be) connected to SURJ.

Why: Because spiritual communities - and the multi-faith community - have a role to play in advancing racial justice, and we want to learn from each other how best to move forward, both within our congregations/communities, and in public partnership and advocacy.

When: Beginning Spring 2016, and continuing through the end of 2016 (or beyond, if you choose!)

THE BASICS

1. **Build a team:** Find 4-6 white people in your faith community/congregation who want to begin or expand racial justice efforts.
2. **Choose activities:** Identify 3 or more activities from the areas below, based on the unique context of your community. We'll expand on this more below.
 - o **Reflection/study:** activities that help white people to understand white supremacy, how it operates within us and our communities, and our role in dismantling it.
 - o **External action:** public witness to disrupt white supremacy and move toward a more racially just world.
 - o **Ritual/celebration:** including racial justice in your community's common life, in ways that are authentic and within your practice and theology.
3. **Schedule your activities** and invite members of your congregation to join you.
4. **Listen to others:** Make a list of 6-10 white people in your faith community to talk with one-on-one. After you have begun your own reflections, meet with them and listen to their experiences dealing with race and whiteness. These conversations can help you learn about what people are excited or unsure about, what tensions they are feeling, and strengthen your relationships to do this together. (See below and the [Listening Project Guide](#) for more detail.)
5. **Connect and learn with SURJ as you move forward!** SURJ will provide regular opportunities for connection, support, and coaching so that we can support and learn from one another. In addition, stay tuned for training events for congregations/spiritual communities/faith leaders coming later in 2016.

What this project is: a short-term opportunity for white/mostly white congregations/spiritual communities to practice activities with the goal of dismantling white supremacy, and to share successes and learnings with one another and the larger SURJ community, towards a broader campaign launch. It's designed for congregations/communities who want some light structure and support, and is intentionally open to creative possibilities within each community.

What this project isn't: an exact recipe we provide for deep discernment for your community about your role in ending white supremacy. We are providing connections to resources from specific faith/spiritual traditions and denominations, but not deep training in those resources. And, we want you to be creative and responsive to your own local context.

Why we talk about white supremacy: 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. We believe it is important to name the entire system for what it is, and the impacts it has not only on individuals but the whole community. [This piece](#) by indigenous scholar Andrea Smith is a useful framework for thinking about this.

BUILDING OUT THE BASICS

1. Build a team and set a meeting date

Find 2-4 white people in your spiritual community/congregation who want to begin or expand racial justice efforts. This will be your team to guide this project forward. By working as a team, you can build deeper relationships, support one another, access multiple strengths and perspectives, troubleshoot together, and, of course, share effort and tasks.

Notice that we suggested **inviting other white people to join you. This is because SURJ is primarily an organization of white people organizing other white people, with accountability to people and communities of color** (see more about Accountability below). We both take responsibility for coming up with ways to educate ourselves and to take action for racial justice, AND we are in accountable relationships with people of color about what we are doing and why. In this project, accountability might be with people of color in your own spiritual community - maybe your team will organize some activities primarily for white people, and some activities in partnership with people of color. If you are primarily or exclusively a white congregation, accountability might be with a local community organization or or group led by people of color. Your local SURJ chapter can also be a good place to find ways to make connections. We will continue to offer support and resources as we learn together.

Your community may have a ready-made team (in the form of a social justice committee or anti-racism council) or you may want to ask a couple people to join you for this project. If you are inviting others to be part of a team, here are a few guidelines:

1. Who would you be excited to work with? Do any of these people bring something different from you? (Other relationships in the community, another way of thinking, a perspective from a different generation/gender/background, etc.)
2. Make as specific an ask as you can. ("I'm building a team of people to work together on racial justice for the rest of 2016 as part of a learning project with SURJ. We'll be inviting our community to reflect internally, and taking public actions. We'll probably meet about once a month, maybe a little more at the beginning as we work out the details.")
3. Make the ask personal! ("This project is exciting to me because and I'd really like to work with *you* because")
4. Remember, you might have to ask 4-5 people to get 2-3 people to say yes. That's great! When someone says no to an invitation extended with grace and intention, they walk away knowing that you want to work with them. Sometimes, just the conversation moves them (or you) to a deeper place and opens the door to more engagement later.

Finally, a note about leadership, whatever that looks like in your community. If it's appropriate, you might want to make sure you include someone in formal leadership (elected to a council, an ordained person, chair of a committee) on the team leading the project. Or maybe you want to schedule a call or a meeting with that person to ask for their support even if they won't be on the committee. Chances are you'll know best about who it's important to engage as you get started.

Get your team together, build community, and start planning! We've drafted a [suggested agenda](#) for your first meeting to get you started.

2a. Choose Activities, Part 1: Values and Grounding

Before jumping into action planning, please take time to consider the following and how you will include them in your project.

SURJ Shared Values

The work of SURJ, including SURJ-Faith, is rooted in a set of shared values, which we share briefly here. See [SURJ's website](#) for more! As you read them with your team, think about how these values are also reflected in your faith/spiritual tradition and how they will infuse your work.

**** Calling People In, Not Calling Out ****

Our focus is on working with White people who are already in motion. While in many activist circles there can be a culture of shame and blame, we want to bring as many White people into taking action for racial justice as possible.

**** Take Risks, Learn, and Keep Going ****

We know that we will have to take risks. Every day, People of Color take risks in living their lives with full dignity. We challenge ourselves and other White people to take risks as well, to show up against a racist system, actions and structures everyday. We know that in that process, we will make mistakes. Our goal is to learn from those mistakes and keep showing up again and again for what is right and for racial justice.

**** Tap into Mutual Interest ****

We use the term mutual interest to help us move from the idea of helping others, or just thinking about what is good for us, to understanding that our own liberation as white people, our own humanity, is inextricably linked to racial justice. What is at stake for us as white people? Mutual interest means we cannot overcome the challenges we face unless we work for racial justice. It means our own freedom is bound up in the freedom of people of color.

***“The battle is and always has been a battle
for the hearts and minds of White people in this country.
The fight against racism is our issue.
It’s not something that we’re called on to help People of Color with.
We need to become involved with it as if our lives depended on it
because really, in truth, they do.”***

Anne Braden

A white, Southern, anti-racist organizer and activist

**** Accountability through Collective Action ****

We maintain ongoing relationships, individually and organizationally with leaders and organizations led by People of Color. We also know it is our work to organize other White people and we are committed to moving more White people for collective action. We also know we don't have all the answers. We can't rebuild the world we want alone- we must build powerful, loving intersectional movements of millions taking action for racial justice. (***Please [read more about Accountability here on SURJ's website.](#)***)

For SURJ, accountability also means that we as both individuals and as a group are answerable to communities of color for our decisions and actions. We build accountability through collaborative relationships and working together.

To be clear, we'll expect congregations/spiritual communities to be building and/or strengthening accountability relationships with People of Color-led organizations as part of this project. For multi-racial congregations/spiritual communities participating in this learning project, it will also be important for white folks to build accountable relationships with people of color within your own congregation.

Accountability is not about asking permission, necessarily, or checking in on every detail of a plan. Accountability can start with a conversation like this: "Hey, this is what we want to do. Here's why we feel it's important, and how we feel the whole community will grow from the process. What concerns do you have about what we're planning? Is there anything you would like us to consider or think about in this process?"

**** Enough for Everyone****

One of the things that dominant white culture teaches us is to feel isolation and scarcity in everything we do. SURJ believes that there is enough for all of us, but it is unequally distributed and structurally contained to keep resources scarce. We believe that part of our role as white people is to fight the structures that limit and control global capital and to raise resources to support People of Color-led efforts.

**** Growing is Good ****

Sometimes we get afraid that if we bring in new people who do not talk our talk or "do it right" it will mess up what we are building. However, if we do not bring in new people, our work cannot grow. And if our work does not grow, we cannot bring the numbers of white people needed to undermine white supremacy and join People of Color-led efforts for fundamental change. We must grow our groups and our movement, understanding that welcoming people in, even at the risk of it being messy, is deeply part of what we are being called to do.

Take Honest Stock of Power

Connected to the values of Mutual Interest and Accountability, the framework of this project is not one of "helping" People of Color or "reconciling" cultural differences. Rather, our framework is one of finding active ways to disrupt and dismantle power that devalues some lives in favor of others.

In her book "[Dear White Christians](#)," Harvey says, "The racial problem, or the problem of racism—the actual racial situation in our faith communities—is not separateness itself. And togetherness is certainly no solution. Separateness is merely a symptom. The real problem is what our differences represent, how they came to be historically, and what they mean materially and structurally still." In other words, those differences are about power -- who has it, and what is done with it. As [she writes at HuffPost](#), "Instead of focusing on our common humanity, we needed to see that blacks and whites hold different power. We needed not only to name the existence of black suffering, but to recognize white oppression as its cause...we must take on the social structures that constrain and damage black life to truly heal as a nation."

Harvey calls us to take up reparative, restorative (and yes, riskier) work, that is, reparations work - shifting power - rather than reconciliation or diversity efforts (see Daniel José Camacho's piece, "[Do Multi-Cultural Churches Reinforce Racism?](#)" for more).

Harvey and Camacho are addressing white Christian contexts; the intersection of white & Christian privilege certainly means our Christian folks have a lot to do around race and power. For other traditions, considering power is still important. White Jewish communities might consider the theme of liberation that arises in the [Exodus story at Pesach](#) and of [atonement at Yom Kippur](#), and the transformative potential of the [communal ritual of Tashlich](#). White UUA congregations might consider the [7 Principles](#) as they relate to the redistribution of power. White Buddhists might consider the [role of mindfulness](#) in the work of racial-justice, as well as [modern interpretations](#) of traditional Buddhist teachings such as interdependence, the Four Noble Truths, and the Bodhisattva vow. White pagans can connect to the historical role of the Craft as a form of [resistance / resilience](#) among the downtrodden of Western culture, and build on the political focus of lineages such as [Reclaiming](#) in their work.

Taking honest stock of power requires us to ask questions like the following, either within our own institution, or when we are examining structures in society broadly:

- Who is at this table? Who has the decision-making power?
- Who benefits most/least from the decisions made? Who is harmed?

- Who holds the money and the resources? Who benefits from how those get distributed?
- In what ways do our liturgies/practices/worship spaces reinforce harmful messages about power, whiteness, the valuing of certain lives and ways of knowing?

When we take time to observe and ask these questions in our institutions and of the decision-making structures and institutions in our communities, we can begin to find ways to disrupt oppressive power systemically.

Embodiment

Doing the work of racial justice, and particularly the work of disrupting the ways white supremacy functions in us as white people, is difficult work. To come face-to-face with the traumatic impact of white supremacy, and its betrayal of our own humanity, can cause emotional and psychosomatic reactions such as anger, denial, shame, fear of loss, and shame. We feel immense discomfort in that confrontation because white supremacy normalizes white comfort, disconnecting us from our capacity to recognize the vast disparities upon which systemic oppression is built.

We can recognize these reactions are at least partially about grief. We experience grief when we realize that the world is not how we have been taught. We experience grief at the immense amount of pain that suddenly becomes clear. We experience grief when the work of collective liberation seems overwhelming. We experience grief when we discover the trauma of how white supremacy has robbed us of our own capacity to be fully human.

“I offer this essay as a love note to my White self and my White siblings, those of us who are already in the struggle to end White supremacy. When we witness White denial and anger, instead of reactively rolling our eyes, or lashing out, we should strain to hear behind the lies and distortions a cry for support, for time and space to begin the work to confront our White absence. That is our calling as White people working to end racism— and it’s work that we are uniquely positioned to do. It is work we must do.”

**Abe Lateiner,
“Grieving the White Void”**

This discomfort and grief live in our bodies. So as part of this project we are inviting you to include some embodied practice to keep us grounded and centered in our bodies, able to feel all - sadness, joy, righteous anger - that we are capable of feeling, and connected to other ways of knowing besides our heads. (One way whiteness functions is to keep us disconnected from our feelings, and only live in our heads!) Breathing, communal walking, contemplative/meditative practices, gentle stretches all can be practices to keep us connected to our bodies and to begin to reclaim our full selves back from whiteness.

Embodied practice can be transformative for our communities. It’s important that we do these practices not only as individuals, but collectively as well. For example, we suggest beginning each gathering with an embodied grounding practice, such as the “Body Scan” or “Present Moment” exercises [explained here](#) from White Awake.

“Embodied transformation is foundational change that shows in our actions, ways of being, relating, and perceiving. It is transformation that sustains over time. Somatics pragmatically supports our values and actions becoming aligned. It helps us to develop depth and the capacity to feel ourselves, each other and life around us. Somatics builds in us the ability to act from strategy and empathy, and teaches us to be able to assess conditions and “what is” clearly.”

**“What Is Politicized Somatics?”
Generative Somatics**

For more about somatic (i.e. embodied) transformational practice, we recommend resources from [White Awake](#), as well as these three pieces from Generative Somatics, a partner with SURJ as well as organizations like Black Lives Matter and the National Domestic Workers Alliance:

[“The Transformative Power of Practice”](#)

[“What is ‘Politicized Somatics?’”](#)

[“Why Somatics for a Social Justice and Transformative Movement?”](#)

2b. Choose Activities, Part 2: The Praxis Menu

Action Comfort Zone Tool

Communities of color are asking white folks to take increasing risk in their actions. This tool offers a framing for why we should explore bolder actions that require more personal risk-taking, and helps with taking an inventory of our personal and organizational action comfort zones. As you consider what action your spiritual community might take, think about what is already in your comfort zone, and how you might make one move beyond that.

Action Comfort Zone Worksheet - [via Dropbox](#)

"If you don't ever walk through trouble, or confront a risk, or reach beyond your comfort zone, you will never meet the rest of yourself."

Dr. Vincent Harding

Freedom Movement Historian & Activist

The Praxis Menu: Suggestions for Activities and Actions

Congregations/spiritual communities should try at least **one** action from **each** area during the duration of the pilot project. The role of the team within the congregation is to identify which thing(s) to try, work with congregational leadership to create a timeline, and evaluate. Also, these are suggestions! Be creative and responsive to your local context.

Our "menu" is rooted in a liberationist praxis model, developed out of [Paolo Freire's work](#) and the related liberation theology work from Latin America.



- "See" -- analyzing the context around us. This includes paying attention to the impact white supremacy makes on our own white selves and bodies. What are we seeing? This analysis is intended to move us towards action, not study for study's sake.
- "Act" -- taking action based on what we see, from direct non-violent action and resistance to shifting resources to changing systems. What are we going to do in response to what we see? Action is grounded in our values.
- "Reflection on Action" -- what did we learn -- about systemic oppression, about institutions, about ourselves -- in doing this action? How do we embody this learning in our worship/ritual life together?

Then we return to "See," with new learnings that we carry. This on-going cycle deepens our work together over time and keeps us in movement.

The Praxis Menu

Reflection/Study

- Workshop on Racial Justice/White Supremacy 101 for white people; grounded in your tradition
- Issue-specific readings and discussions
- Book study group: Suggested readings include:
 - [The New Jim Crow](#), by Michelle Alexander (study guides [here](#); free Jewish study guide [here](#))
 - [An Indigenous People's History of the US](#), Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
 - [Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation](#), by Jennifer Harvey
 - [Towards the "Other America,"](#) by Chris Crass with interviews with white activists/faith leaders
 - [Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery](#), a movement of Anabaptist People of Faith
 - Readings from [White Awake](#), [Buddhists for Racial Justice](#), [Radical Dharma](#) and [Turning Wheel Media](#), for white Buddhists
 - [Gods and Radicals](#), readings for white Pagans
- Grounding somatic practice to put us in touch with our bodies. See [White Awake](#) for examples.
- Embodying SURJ values as spiritual practices
- [Examine how white supremacy functions](#) in our faith institutions, congregations, liturgies, rituals
- Hold a non-violent direct action training
- If your congregation is “welcoming/Open and Affirming/Reconciling/etc.” reflect on how “Pride” events often perpetuate racism and white supremacy. See for example these statements about the [#BlackOutPride disruption](#) in Chicago in 2015, and the [Justice4Jessie disruption](#) in Denver in 2015.
- Hold a Know Your Rights training. See also this great “[Know Your Responsibilities](#)” resource from JFREJ.
- Learn the “people’s history” of your congregation/spiritual community’s neighborhood, city, state, and how that history still impacts your local context. Start by learning which indigenous peoples belong to the land where you/your community’s building reside.
- Learn where your congregation’s financial investments are.
- [Racial Justice Lens](#) for Issues/Campaigns Tool

Public Action

- Center a racial justice lens on spiritual community/congregation’s current commitment(s)
- Black Lives Matter or I (heart) My Muslim Neighbors [banner/sign](#)
- Choose a campaign/group to show up for
- Recruit members to be a rapid response team
- Raise funds for a particular POC led project/organization
- Join local/national SURJ campaigns already going on
- Build an accountability relationship with an organization or faith community that is predominantly People of Color led
- Door-knocking/neighborhood canvass (SURJ [has tools](#) for this)
- Organize/Participate in a direct action related to racial justice (we can provide examples)
- Plan/carry out ways to disrupt white supremacy in your institution
- Participate in/organize an alternative Pride event that is centered on collective liberation; march in the parade with a #BlackTransLivesMatter banner (for example)
- Offer your space to a POC-led group that needs safe meeting space.
- Provide meals, funds, childcare, healing spaces for activists - for meetings and also direct actions
- [Check out Tikkun’s list here](#) for more ideas!

Ritual/Celebration

- Choose several worship events and highlight racial justice
- Write prayers and use during service
- Speaking/preaching
- Healing services of grief, lament, embodied ritual work, and re-commitment
- Identify specific rituals/celebrations/holidays within your spiritual traditions to connect with racial justice
- [Ideas for creating ritual](#)

What if My Community is Already Working on Social Justice Issues?

Wonderful! It's great that you are already proactive and involved. Since race and racism are part of every social justice issue, you have a structure for learning and introspection at your congregation. Are you working on homelessness? [Forty percent of homeless people are African American](#) (compared to 11% of the general population). Is your issue gun violence prevention? [Guns kill black people at twice the rate of white people](#). Does your congregation focus on poverty? [1 in 4 Native Americans live below the poverty level](#) and [on reservations such as Pine Ridge that number is greater than 90%](#). Who has power to make decisions about - and spend resources to address - these particular social justice issues?

Use whatever issues your spiritual community has dedicated themselves to as [lenses](#) into better understanding how white supremacy and racial injustice operate in these specific areas. As part of this learning project, see what you can do with your community to go one or two steps further, in either reflection, action, or ritual to link racism and white supremacy with these concerns.

3. Schedule Your Actions

Be sure to include time for debriefing all your different activities, including direct actions, as well as periodic evaluation of the project.

4. Listen to others

See the [attached guide](#) for one way to plan for conversations within your spiritual community. Although this is not a dialogue project, knowing one another's stories, and taking time to honor where we come from is a critical part of racial justice work. Whiteness often functions to separate us from one another, and this is one way to push back directly, breaking down individualism and building community to disrupt white supremacy.

5. Connect and Learn with SURJ as you Move Forward

SURJ will provide regular opportunities for connection and so that we can support and learn from one another.

- Regularly scheduled participant support calls with the SURJ team
- Coaching support
- Call support about each of 3 “menu” areas (Reflection, Action, Ritual) and One-on-Ones
- Regional call and/or gathering at least 1x
- Stay tuned for other training opportunities in the Fall of 2016.

Support Call Schedule: Please Mark Your Calendars Now:

Ongoing support calls: SURJ Values, Teambuilding, & Learning

- June: One-on-One support from SURJ as we get rolling
- July 7 (am) and 21 (pm)
- August 4 (am) and 18 (pm)
- September 1(am) and 15 (pm)
- Oct 20 (pm)
- Nov 17 (pm)
- Dec 15 (pm)

Content Support Calls: Praxis Menu and One-on-Ones. **All PM Calls**

- Monday, July 18th: Listening project: One-on-Ones
- Monday, August 15th: Menu: Public Action
- Monday, September 19th: Menu: Reflection/Study
- Monday, October 17th: Menu: Ritual/Celebration

For all calls:

AM: 9amPacific/10amMountain/11amCentral/12pmEastern

PM: 5pmPacific/6pmMountain/7pmCentral/8pmEastern

Regional Call and/or Gathering: TBD depending on regional participation

Resources

Check out our [SURJ-Faith toolkits](#) for many more multi-faith theological resources and action ideas.

We are building out connections to tradition/denominational resources. Stay tuned!

Appendix

[Listening Project Guide](#)

[Racial Justice Lens for Issues/Campaigns Tool](#)

[Suggested First Meeting Agenda](#)



A huge thank you to all the folks who helped put together this resource guide!