

# Anti-Bias Churches:

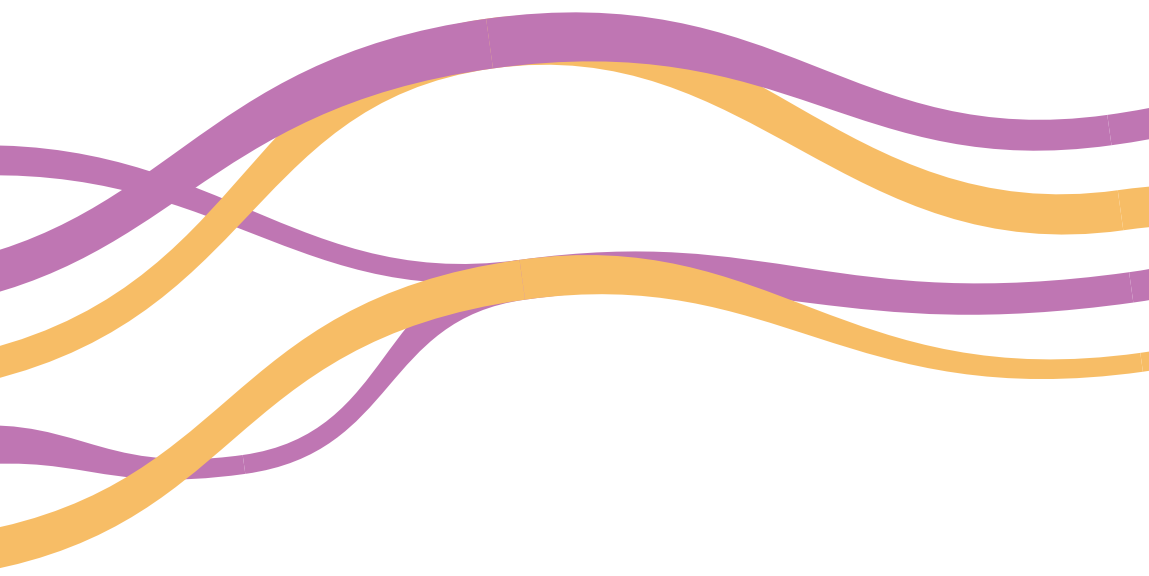
## An Ecumenical Anti-(Un)Conscious Bias Toolkit

Unlearning—Undoing—Relearning— Redoing

Dr Elaine Brown Spencer  
Dr Masiwa Ragies Gunda



World Council  
of Churches



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# Preface

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Have you ever wondered why, after sharing a joke or passing a comment, your friends simply became speechless? Has a good friend ever called you aside and said, “When we are alone, it is okay to say this or to do this, but when there are others, I suggest you avoid this?” There are things that we do with our friends, that our friends tolerate—because they know us so well that they know we do not mean any harm—but which would cause offence and harm to those who come from the same ethnic background as your friend(s) because they do not know you as well as your friend(s) do and thus did not know that you did not intend harm. We do not have to be people who enjoy inflicting pain on others to actually inflict pain on others. Many well-meaning people cause offence and pain every day, unintentionally or unconsciously.

Have you ever wondered why that particular daughter-in-law in that family is hated by everyone in the family and community except her husband? Have you ever wondered why some social and political movements are becoming very popular by insisting on anti-immigration propaganda? Have you ever reflected on why, even though an institution has embraced equality, it still has only one ethnic group in charge of finance or other critical decision-making positions? Culturally, politically, religiously, economically, legally—communities have developed narratives about the Other and built stereotypes about that Other. These stereotypes are learned, internalized, and stored in our subconscious to inform our everyday engagements with that Other: the stereotypes inform us what to give the Other and what to deny that “Other,” whether to bring the Other inside or keep them outside and in some cases the people enforcing these systems do not even realize the existence of these inbuilt biases and consider themselves to be upholding merit-based systems.

There are people who have denied others opportunities based on stereotypes that have created internal biases against some communities and groups of people. I invite you, as an individual and as a community, to work on challenging our acquired knowledge, especially that in our subconscious about other people, to unlearn the stereotypes and biases that have the potential of souring relationships with sisters and brothers from other communities.

This is yet another of the many opportunities that we have to join in the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity as proclaimed by the World Council of Churches’ 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2022.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay  
General secretary  
World Council of Churches





# Foreword

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Systemic racism, xenophobia, or discrimination have normalized inequalities. Opportunities are more accessible for some and inaccessible to others because of ethnic, cultural, social, economic, political, national, or gender identity. Such systems of exclusion are deeply entrenched. We cannot see or touch them because they are hidden behind people who enforce them in our daily lives. Systems can be legal and constitutional, backed by a litany of policies, laws, blueprints, strategies, and implementation plans; they can also be cultural and religious, backed by doctrines, rituals, customs, values, norms, and taboos. In both instances, whether legal or cultural, some aspects of systems are built on stereotypes of both those holding the power of putting a system in place and of those the system wishes to deprive or exploit. While stereotypes are not factual, they are propagated by the powerful to the extent that they become part of what everyone will learn as the truth of a community through the family, the school, the faith community, tertiary institutions of learning, the workplace, and even in burial places. This aggressive and intensive propagation of a stereotype etches it on our subconscious and, from there, informs our perceptions and attitudes toward other people. Such perceptions and attitudes can result in conscious but also unconscious biases. While our work tends to confront conscious racism, xenophobia, and discrimination, it is time that we also begin to confront the unconscious biases that sometimes manifest in the words, actions, and attitudes of well-meaning friends and colleagues.

This toolkit invites all of us, irrespective of our identity, to take a step back and do self-introspection and diagnose our own biases and begin to work to address them as our commitment to healthy relationships in our communities. Only healthy relationships can make us realize the quest for justice, reconciliation, and unity that guides our work at the World Council of Churches since the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2022 until the next assembly in 2030.

Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata  
Programme director for Public Witness and Diakonia  
World Council of Churches





# Transversal on Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia, and related Discrimination

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Following the racially motivated massacre of African–American Christians in Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina, USA, on 17 June 2015, the World Council of Churches (WCC), through engagements of staff and governing bodies, re-opened discussions on the sin of racism in the world. Pilgrim team visits to Asia and North America in the intervening years spotlighted the reality of racism globally. The experiences, observations, and harvests from these visits demonstrated how deeply entrenched racism is around the world. It identified Africans, People of African Descent, Indigenous Peoples, Asians, People of Asian Descent, Latinos/as/x among racialized communities, who at different points and to varying degrees, have had and continue to deal with racial prejudice, racial discrimination, and systemic racism. In 2021, the WCC formally launched the Transversal<sup>1</sup> on Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia, and Related Discrimination. The WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany (2022) affirmed this new transversal and reiterated and re-affirmed the proclamation “Racism is a sin against God” of the 5th Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1975.<sup>2</sup> This proclamation informs our work, theologically and practically.

Since the 11th Assembly, the goal of this transversal is “Catalysing the churches’ engagement in the dismantling of structures and systems that perpetuate racial, xenophobic, and related discriminations and facilitating processes of reparation and reconciliation.”<sup>3</sup>

Across the ecumenical movement, there has always been outrage and shock in response to the reality of racism. Since 1948, every WCC assembly has expressed a growing outrage with the fact that racism was so widespread in the world but most disturbingly within churches as well. The point is, there are many Christians and people of goodwill who have vowed not to be racists, maybe even to be anti-racists, but who are products of societies that have normalized racially motivated stereotypes of other people. In some societies, we have stereotypes of other

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1 In the WCC, a transversal is a cross-cutting issue whose focus must be shared by all programmatic interventions of the WCC. There are six such transversal issues in the WCC currently: Church and Ecumenical Relations; Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement; Just Community of Women and Men; Inter-religious Dialogue and Cooperation; Spiritual Life; and Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia, and related Discrimination.

2 WCC, *Breaking Barriers: The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches Nairobi 1975*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975, 109-110, and WCC 11th Assembly, *Message of the 11th Assembly – A Call to Act Together*, Karlsruhe: WCC 11th Assembly, 31 August – 8 September 2022, 2022.

3 WCC Central Committee, *WCC Strategic Plan 2023 – 2030 Revised PRO 03 rev EN*, Geneva: WCC, 21-27 June 2023, 19.

ethnicities, nations, languages, cultures, faiths, or religions. These stereotypes often lead us to be xenophobic, racist, or discriminatory even without being conscious of what we are actually doing.

We believe unconscious biases are not natural or permanent biases; they can be unlearned and undone while we can all relearn and redo things that promote better and healthier relationships across communities.

Through this toolkit, we seek to strengthen the quality of allyship in our ecumenical anti-racism, anti-xenophobia, and anti-discrimination commitment by intentionally focusing on the things that allies—both individuals and communities—and institutions and other people of goodwill ought to also address within themselves. We all have biases. We know some of our biases, but there are also some biases that we have acquired that demand more intentional scrutiny from ourselves to expose them and unlearn them, and we can learn anew the beauty of healthy relationships.

Welcome to a world free of unconscious biases and an ecumenical movement that is willing to unlearn and undo and to relearn and redo relationships toward justice, reconciliation, and unity.

Dr Masiwa Ragies Gunda  
Programme executive for Overcoming Racism,  
Xenophobia, and related Discrimination  
World Council of Churches  
January 2024







# Introduction

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“At my workplace, accounts is stricter when *people like me* give expenditure reports; my receipts are scrutinized countless times, and I must write several emails to explain myself. But my white colleagues never experience this; their submissions are considered true and credible; even when we attend similar events, I have to explain myself always.”<sup>4</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified deep-rooted racial inequities and inequalities within healthcare, education, the economy, and religious settings. Systemic racism has been institutionalized to the point where it is normalized in everyday policies and practices. With the heightened risk to health globally, the pandemic created a platform for explicit biases to play out in the public sphere, especially with social media becoming accessible to people who could also hide behind the anonymity it provides. Biases were legalized under the pretext of addressing the pandemic; racialized communities, especially from the global South, found already complicated visa regimes of the North even more complicated and restrictive.

Far-right social and political movements unashamedly drove an anti-immigrant agenda based on stereotypes and continued to grow credible political power in the North. The WCC is critically concerned by these developments, especially as people who mean well are sometimes caught up in scandals because they express an idea, attitude, or perception that is biased, racist, xenophobic, or discriminatory. The WCC is committed to addressing prejudices that make workplaces, places of worship, communities, and societies toxic. The WCC is committed to a world and churches that create environments in which all people—staff, clients, stakeholders, partners, members, or citizens—are embraced, valued, and enabled to reach their full potential.

In everything we do, we wish to be challenged by the simple but profound principle, expressed succinctly in the Gospel of Luke (NRSVA): “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (6:31)<sup>5</sup>

Organizations need tools and education to help ensure the values of equity, inclusion, and diversity are reflected in their policies and practices. To do so, it is important to acknowledge the (un)conscious biases we hold and the impact these have on those historically treated inhumanely. For example, the effects of

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<sup>4</sup> Words of a colleague from Africa working for a reputable ecumenical organization about her experiences working in the global North as an African expatriate. (Or is it as a migrant?) We keep her identity anonymous because her words are critically important, and we do not want to make an already toxic working environment worse.

<sup>5</sup> All scriptural references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA) of the Bible.

colonialism have led to systemic racism and systemic xenophobia among former colonized neighbours, abject poverty characterized by lack of access to food and water, food insecurity and non-existent food sovereignty, and loss of language and identity, which has overwhelmingly been experienced by “Black People”<sup>6</sup> and racialized people. Racism and xenophobia are learned and undergirded by histories of enslavement, colonization, and (white) supremacy. It impacts the way we view others and how racialized and marginalized people end up carrying disproportionate burdens wherever they are.

The WCC is providing this introductory toolkit to support the secretariat, member churches, ecumenical partners, specialized ministries, faith communities, and people of goodwill to intentionally do self-introspection to increase awareness of the work toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our communities and beyond. Participants who apply the tools will be exhorted to reflect on their unconscious biases and develop a justice orientation aligning with their Christian beliefs.

The toolkit aims to help the WCC call the attention of its staff, member churches, ecumenical partners, specialized ministries, faith communities, and people of goodwill to the reality of unconscious biases and their impact on relationships. This is especially important because our mainstream work confronts conscious biases, yet unconscious biases can still result in traumatic experiences for victims of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. This toolkit calls on everyone, from leaders to young children, to unlearn and undo the norms and values we have unconsciously embraced, which result in racial prejudices, discrimination, and racism. It challenges everyone to relearn and redo norms and values that uphold the dignity, equality, and equity of all people and creation for a new world that is good: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” (Gen. 1:31)

### Questions for Reflection

**Are there instances in your family, community, or organization when you have felt some people are always treated with suspicion or considered dishonest until they prove themselves otherwise? Try to find out why this is so if it is present. Discuss your experiences in small groups.**

<sup>6</sup> In this toolkit, we are using “Black People” to refer to Africans, People of African Descent, and other people with high levels of melanin concentration but who neither identify as Africans nor People of African Descent. We use this in quotes to indicate that we are aware that this Black is neither a fact nor a skin colour but rather ideological. While “Black People” are part of the broader racialized people, they have historically been the worst of them all due to the fact that the European-designed racial hierarchy placed them at the bottom of the ladder, meaning all others have had their own claims of superiority over “Black People.”



## Vision

“For seventy-five years, the vision of the WCC has been expressed as a commitment to *stay together, pray together, move together, and act together* as a fellowship of churches seeking visible unity and common witness.”<sup>7</sup> This vision has often been challenged by the realities of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination that are informed by conscious and unconscious prejudices and biases, even among Christians.

To continue in this tradition of staying, praying, moving, and acting together, the 11th Assembly issued an invitation to a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation and unity,<sup>8</sup> an invitation that acknowledges the fragmentation, deprivation, and rejection visited upon other people of God due to systemic biases that are often enforced intentionally and sometimes unintentionally but with similar consequences.

By developing this ecumenical anti-bias toolkit, the WCC transversal on Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia and Related Discrimination hopes to contribute to the realization of the overall institutional vision by

- committing to a global community where people of God from varying racial, ethnic, cultural, economic, social, and linguistic backgrounds can thrive as faithful followers of Christ and people of God;
- following biblical principles of love, justice, and fairness to acknowledge and seek to challenge and dismantle our own, as well as systemic biases;
- raising awareness, bringing actionable change, and equipping WCC staff, member churches, ecumenical partners, and specialized ministries with skills to mitigate the effects of bias, including unconscious biases, when working with diverse peoples; and
- advancing racial equity in the ecumenical movement, in mission, and in education—including in theology and ecumenical relations.

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<sup>7</sup> World Council of Churches, “WCC Strategic Plan 2023–2030 Revised,” 21–27 June 2023, <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/PRO%2003%20rev%20WCC%20Strategic%20Plan%202023-2030.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> World Council of Churches, “*Message of the 11th Assembly: A Call to Act Together*,” 31 August–8 September 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/ADOPTED-MC01rev-Message-of-the-11th-Assembly.pdf>.



## What is the Anti-Bias Churches toolkit?

- An introductory set of tools to support an anti-racism, anti-xenophobia, anti-discrimination, and welcoming workplace with member churches and ecumenical partners
- A workplace and community resource to provide a scripture-based understanding of our responsibilities to eliminate racial disparities and advance equality and equity to members of the WCC, its partners, and all people of God
- A list of definitions of commonly used terms, with examples and actions to support the education of WCC and its partners
- An introductory Bible study template to implement anti-bias training for ministry partners

## What is the purpose of the toolkit?

The introductory anti-bias toolkit intends to


- augment existing training to acculturate anti-bias within the WCC, member churches, and ecumenical partners;
- provide awareness and education on (un)conscious bias for WCC member churches, staff of the WCC, and partners associated with the

WCC whose work entails interaction and collaboration with diverse peoples;

- grow a body of knowledge to help promote inclusive workplaces and churches that acknowledge diversity in all areas of life and work, especially as it relates to racialized people and people of different ethnicities;
- create an environment where staff from diverse backgrounds feel spiritually, psychologically, and emotionally safer to work and thrive;
- encourage ongoing education in DEI in work and religious settings, and
- highlight a greater understanding of racial disparities and identify discriminatory barriers that interfere with the hiring and retaining of talent.

## **What will the toolkit provide?**

The toolkit will provide education through its offerings, including:

- insights to recognize unconscious biases and a framework to mitigate and minimize such biases in the discharge of professional, pastoral, and spiritual duties
  - definitions of commonly used DEI terms
  - guidance, tips, and considerations for establishing a DEI culture and framework
  - information to improve recruitment and retention for underrepresented communities who seek employment and ministry posts within WCC, member churches, specialized ministries, and faith communities in general
  - education to advance racial equity to apply a change management process that promotes a more inclusive and equitable organization.
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# Setting a Biblical Foundation

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## Faith and Injustice

As Christians, we should be intentional about expressing Christian values in our interactions with others. God is concerned with the plight of human beings, especially those who are downtrodden, overlooked, facing uphill battles, and not expected to succeed due to injustices inflicted upon them. We must not only speak of injustices in our world but act to address them. Further, we must not only speak of injustices committed by others but forget to look at our own shortcomings, intentional or unintentional; the consequences are often similar.

There are many examples in the Bible (see Bible study resource section) that highlight the importance of the church in reflecting the light of God. Matthew 5:14 says, “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”

In learning about unconscious bias, consider scriptures that remind us of our Christian faith and how we should respond to injustices in our world with love and action. As we use this toolkit to reflect, the following scriptures may help to lay a foundation for our learning.

## Scripture References

### ***Isaiah 1:17***

“learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

### ***Isaiah 56:1***

“... Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.”

### ***Psalms 89:14***

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you..”

### ***Psalms 106:3***

“Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times.”

### ***Zechariah 7:9-10***

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgements, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do

not devise evil in your hearts against one another.”

***Proverbs 28:5***

“The evil do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely..”

***Isaiah 61:8***

“For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.”

***Proverbs 21:3***

“To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.”

***Genesis 1:26-28***

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’”

***Hosea 4:6-7***

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; they changed their glory into shame.”

***Lamentations 3:40***

“Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord.”

***2 Corinthians 13:5***

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to pass the test!”

***James 1:23-25***

“For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.”

***1 John 1:9***

“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

***Philippians 4:4-7***

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

***Matthew 7:3-5***

“Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye’, while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye..”

***Acts 2:38-39***

“Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him’.”

***Mark 2:15-16***

“And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?’”







# Definitions of Key Concepts

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As we initiate bold change and work toward fostering an anti-racism, anti-xenophobia, and anti-discrimination organization where all feel they belong, it is essential to understand terms that perpetuate injustice, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination.

## Prejudice

Prejudice is the preconceived attitudes and feelings that give rise to negative judgments of people and result in unfair treatment or disadvantages. It leads to discrimination—intended or unintended behaviours based on “race,” age, ethnicity, religion, gender, and others that limit or deny opportunities or access. Our prejudices have largely negative consequences while also providing unmerited privileges for others.

## Conscious Bias

These are prejudices formed toward people and groups that are not founded upon accurate information or comparisons we make of people based on dominant norms or stereotypes. They are deliberate and are intentionally carried out to hurt, exclude, and deprive targeted groups. Mainstream programming often targets these biases and prejudices.

## Unconscious Bias

Unconscious biases are the attitudes or perceptions we hold that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner, often informed by stereotypes we are socialized into by our own communities. This occurs when one,

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9 The idea of human “races” suggested that the observable physical differences between and among peoples around the world were indicative of each people’s stage in the hierarchy of evolution and development and that the highest stage was that already achieved by Europeans with Africans at the bottom of that hierarchy, with all other people being placed in between these two. It is now scientifically and theologically agreed that there are no human races at all. Race is a social construction with no basis in science or theology. We use “race” in this toolkit only because it is widely used in our communities. While “race” is not real, racism is real. See the United Nations Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice, especially Articles 1 and 2, 27 November 1978, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-race-and-racial-prejudice>. See also, World Council of Churches, “Understanding Racism Today: A Dossier,” 1998, <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/File/racismdossier.pdf>.

without even realizing it, interprets or judges other people based on the stereotypes and perceptions that are lodged in the subconscious. Unconscious bias can result in viewing other practices, expectations, and peoples as inferior, dishonest, lazy, or wrong. While unconscious in commission, the consequences are similar to those of conscious biases.

Unconscious bias is significant and can impact many people in many ways, for example, how some groups navigate intercultural faith communities, spaces and workplaces, migrant reception systems, criminal justice systems, patient-provider relationships in healthcare and treatment recommendations, and access to leadership opportunities both in faith communities and in wider society—all of which contribute to disparities in faith, health, social, and economic opportunities.

## Microaggressions

Microaggressions are common in communities (including in the ecumenical movement and in churches) and workplaces. These are subtle, indirect, sometimes unintentional or unconscious attacks on or discrimination toward members of a racialized community, an ethnic group, or a religious or gender group. While they might appear or sound micro when compared to other forms of racially motivated attacks, these aggressions are sources of trauma, hurt, and mental health challenges for those exposed to such aggressions. As an ally and anti-racist, it is important to first understand the nature and impact of microaggressions to help combat this problem. Some examples of micro-aggressions include statements like: “I don’t see colour or race when I look at you,” “All lives matter,” “Your teeth are white,” “You’re actually good.” They can also be acts like feeling the texture of someone’s hair or collecting leftover food at an event for a member of a racialized minority.

**Looking back at your community or workplace, are there instances you think could be characterized as (un)conscious biases or microaggressions?**





## Diversity

There are many definitions of diversity. Generally, diversity entails the demographic mix of the community, with a focus on the representation of equity-deserving groups.

A diverse community includes a wide range of expressions and experiences that should be valued. It includes the presence of differences within a given setting, like “race,” gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, nationality, confession, sexuality, and lived experience, as well as other characteristics that shape an individual’s perspective.

Diversity strengthens the quality and impact of talents by bringing together multiple ideas and perspectives that enhance productivity in the workplace. Research and statistics show a more diverse workforce inevitably raises the bar of productivity and creates better experiences for service users.<sup>10</sup>

Diversity in organizations involves recognizing and respecting everyone’s unique qualities and attributes but focuses particularly on groups who remain underrepresented and who are historically marginalized.

**Based on the constituency that your organization works with, is the staff complement aligned to the demographic mix of your constituency?**

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<sup>10</sup> World Economic Forum, “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 4.0 A toolkit for leaders to accelerate social progress in the future of work,” June 2020. [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_NES\\_DEI4.0\\_Toolkit\\_2020.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_NES_DEI4.0_Toolkit_2020.pdf).

## Equity

Equity means having a fair and respectful treatment of all people while striving to eliminate barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups. Equity is differentiated from equality in that equality, in simple terms, means doing the same for everyone. In contrast, equity means recognizing the inherent imbalances among people and intentionally making provisions to eliminate such imbalances.

Building an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment entails intentional policy and programme development and assessment. Anti-bias must permeate organizational structures and policy baselines, ensuring that despite ethnicity, race, ability or disability, language, culture, and other factors, the organization fosters an environment where employees can reach their full potential and contribute to the organization in ways that affirm their sense of being.

Building an organization that values DEI principles means treating all people fairly (not simply equally), ensuring everyone has access to the same opportunities. Human resource processes should strive to enforce equity throughout the organization, ensuring that human rights policies, processes, and decisions do not disadvantage some groups or individuals based on their identities or lived experiences. A commitment to equity acknowledges that disparities in opportunities are rooted in historical and contemporary injustices and systemic barriers that need to be broken down.

**Is an equity policy or affirmative action a healthy way to address historic imbalances?**



**EQUALITY**



**EQUITY**

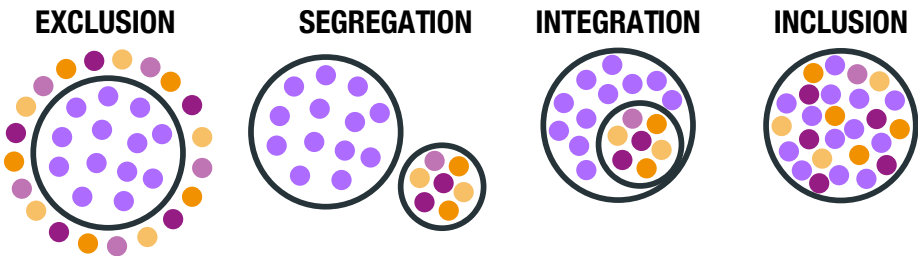
## Inclusion

Inclusion means creating an environment where everyone is treated equitably and with respect, feels welcome, and is able to participate fully.

Inclusion addresses the need for people with different identities to feel they are valued within a given setting. It means creating conditions in which everyone's talents are valued and celebrated.

Inclusion calls up leaders to actively foster conditions where everyone can access opportunities, fully participate, and maximize their creativity and contributions.

It is important to note that while an inclusive group is diverse, a diverse group is not always inclusive. An inclusive workplace strives for equity and works to remove systemic barriers while respecting, valuing, and celebrating differences.



Does your organization pursue an *inclusive* (embrace diversity and not impose uniformity), *integrative* (put them in their own corner inside the group), *segregative* (create their own small community outside the bigger community) or *exclusive* (scatter them outside the main group) approach to minorities and historically marginalized ethnicities?





# Understanding the Impact of Unconscious Bias & Microaggressions

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Unconscious bias and microaggressions inhibit, destroy, deny, and kill many while privileging, advancing, and promoting the opportunities and interests of some, even if that was not the intention of the actor.

To understand how our (un)conscious biases and microaggressions impact others, we must do self-assessments when dealing with racialized or marginalized groups, asking ourselves the following:

- Are we reinforcing negative stereotypes of others?
- When we approach new work or ministry assignments that involve different people than ourselves, are we checking our own bias, and do we know what might constitute microaggressions?
- Is there some empathy in the way we deal with others? Are we considering the plight of others?
- Do we challenge or disrupt ideas that are detrimental to people who have been historically marginalized, racialized, and discriminated?

It's important to see people outside of the negative narratives that society imposes on certain groups. In practice, applying a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens means seeing possibilities in others and not simply being an echo chamber that enforces, upholds, and recycles policies and practices that maintain the status quo.

## Microaggressions

**You are so articulate. You speak excellent English/French/Germany/Spanish. Where are you from (originally)? Everyone can succeed, if you just work hard enough. Is that your real hair? No, where are you really from? You must be good at maths. How long did you travel to get to the airport?**

## Manifestations of (Un)Conscious Bias and Microaggressions

### Example 1:

You hire a Black, Asian, or Indigenous leader (or any other marginalized identity in your context). They were hired because, while your organization works with their community, they were not represented among the staff. However, the hired individual observes that important decisions are being made without them or their inputs are never considered when decisions are made. They don't feel valued at all. The new leader wants to quit, but this is a significant opportunity they don't want to lose. They approach HR for advice.

What do you do?

### Example 2:

A mission trip is planned for South Asia. Everyone invited to the planning meetings is Caucasian. There are several South Asian staff who could provide meaningful insight into the cultural, political, and social landscape of South Asia; however, their input is not solicited. Additionally, every time there's a call for staff to head to that region for Christian outreach, the South Asians in the organization are left out of the planning process. You have an entry-level job and see the value of increasing the diversity of this mission trip.

What do you do?

### Example 3:

A new colleague has just been hired and they are from a racially marginalized community. They are highly qualified and communicative. They join your group of friends during tea break and the following comments are made by your friends: "Is your degree affirmative action?" "I read that you are from Germany, but where are you really from?" "I heard there was a great candidate for that position but then the organization needed some diversity."

How would you react to your friends' questions and comments?





## **Case Scenario for Mitigating and Unlearning (Un)Conscious Bias #1**

Jane is excited that she was hired for a job at Forever God Mission International right out of university. She told her male school friend Fred about her new job and told him they were still looking for people. On her referral, Fred applies for the job, and three months after Jane starts, he's hired. Jane is ecstatic that Fred has the same job she has, but in conversations, learns the following: Fred started at a higher level than she did, he has a higher salary than she has, and he has higher transport, medical, and housing allowances as these are based on basic salary. Jane is confused: They have the same degree; she has a higher grade for that degree; she started three months earlier than Fred. The only difference between them is that she is African (or Latina or Dalit or Indigenous or Asian or Kikuyu or Xhosa or African Initiated Christian, etc), and Fred is European (or White or Shona or Kshatriyas or Caucasian or Protestant or Catholic or Zulu, etc)<sup>11</sup>—could it be that? She becomes angry that she's not being treated like her friend.

Jane becomes withdrawn and frustrated. The enthusiasm she once had for her job wanes and her productivity goes down with it, as she finds herself preoccupied by the discrepancies in their valuation by the organization. She continuously compares her job specifications to Fred's to see if there are any differences, but the positions are identical. Fred is concerned for his friend but does not know what is happening because he believes salaries and conditions of work are private and confidential and, therefore, does not know what Jane now knows. Jane finally decides to speak to her manager about the inequity in the conditions of service. She feels vulnerable and is afraid they might let her go for bringing up this issue. Once Jane explains the situation, her manager immediately recognizes the gender and racial inequity and starts the process to rectify Jane's conditions to match those of her white, male friend.

### ***Summary***

In the scenario, it's important to note that Jane did not feel respected as a new worker, leading to her lack of productivity on the job. The racial and gender inequity she experienced sparked feelings of resentment and anger that whirled in her mind until her situation was addressed.

Equity in practice involves the promotion of fairness and justice in addressing the disparities that diverse communities have experienced. It acknowledges that these disparities are rooted in historical and contemporary injustices and disadvantages. Women, especially racialized women, have fought for equal pay to men for decades. Organizations continue to lag in addressing this reality, and more advocacy for gender equality is needed.

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11 Substitute as necessary and use identity markers appropriate in your context.

Despite the efforts to push through policies and legislation to ensure there is an equal playing field for those historically disadvantaged, inequities continue to happen due to our unconscious biases, especially as they relate to our capacity to re-evaluate organizational traditions and historical policies and practices. An EDI lens challenges our bias to advocate for change.

**Is the secrecy or privacy surrounding organizational remunerations compatible with a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion? What could be an alternative approach?**

## **Case Scenario for Mitigating and Unlearning (Un)Conscious Bias #2**

In your community, there is a growing number of migrants who are settling there. A few of the migrants can speak your language with an accent, but many others cannot speak it; they speak another international language and their own mother tongue. Initially, they come to your church, whose services are held in your language. As most of the migrants cannot understand, they ask for permission to have their own service in their own language in your church, before or after your service.

As the leaders of the church meet to discuss this request, the majority of the leaders are opposed to having an extra service for “these people.” They argue that it would increase the running costs for maintaining the church building, and since they are poor, it will increase their burden. Others also argue that if the migrants are allowed to worship on their own, they will be disorderly, noisy, and start doing things as if they are in Africa (Asia, Caribbean, Latin America, ghettos, or similar).<sup>12</sup> A few of the leaders, however, see this as an opportunity to exercise their sisterly and brotherly love in Christ and argue for an opportunity to be given to this group to worship freely. Eventually, the leaders agree to give the migrants an opportunity on a three-month probation.

During the three-month probation period, the service of the group of newcomer Christians is over-subscribed; migrants from neighbouring villages, towns, and cities are coming over for this service. They are even taking in significant offerings, which they happily hand over to the church to cover the running costs. A few of the members of the host church are also beginning to come for this service. However, during the same period, there are calls to the police every worship day because of the noise coming from the church; one broken chair is paraded in church for the hosting Christians to see how destructive the group is. A campaign begins to end the arrangement at the end of the three-month probation. The leaders ask for a meeting of all host members to decide whether to continue or end the arrangement.

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12 Substitute as necessary using markers common in your context.

As part of the group that is going to decide, what would be your decision and why?

### ***Summary***

Our unconscious attitudes and beliefs can affect the way we deal with others, the way we interpret their actions, and our own actions and attitudes towards them. Hopefully, the example helps us reflect on what informs our perceptions towards other peoples' spirituality, our own spirituality, their work ethic, and their quest for integration or inclusion and how this happens in ways that will make us more open to positive and healthy relationships. Regardless of where an individual may be, inclusion has much to do with being valued in any given setting, worship place, workplace, or team. Without challenging our biases, we can negatively impact incidents within social services and religious settings, that relate to employment hiring and retention, staff satisfaction and productivity, and workforce diversity.

**In small groups, identify and discuss instances of unconscious biases and microaggressions displayed in the case study above.**





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# Confronting our Bias

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It is important to note that everyone holds unconscious beliefs about other people and social groups, and these biases stem from our values, presumptions, upbringing, and how we categorize and organize our social world. It is easy to see the biases against ourselves but more difficult to see our own biases against other people. We need to commit to recognizing our own biases, to unlearning them, and to repairing the hurts and harms we have caused intentionally or unintentionally.

## Acknowledging our Bias

One of the first steps in looking through a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens is having the ability and courage to confront and acknowledge our biases. The biases we hold are so embedded in our society and social structures, we have normalized them and have not questioned where they have negatively impacted racialized or marginalized people.

There are many people in our world who are being taken advantage of because of their differences. As Christians, we must talk about it because people are suffering, and we should have a justice approach to how we minister to others.

**"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." (Matt. 7:12) "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." (Rom. 12:18)**

## How Do We Confront our Biases?

We need to lay a foundation for confronting biases and achieving an equitable and inclusive organization where everyone feels they can reach their full potential. We can begin by applying the four guiding pillars of education, awareness, prevention, and intervention.

### Education

Education—by which we refer to that which is taught in our communities and how it is taught—is a very powerful tool in society. Education can be both formal or non-formal, and education is disseminated through the family, faith community, formal schools and colleges, and sometimes even in the workplace. Through education we learn of the past and the present, and we shape the future.



However, education is not always an innocent social tool; it is a powerful tool and often controlled by the powerful. The powerful decide what will be taught and how it will be taught. Much of what is learned in schools and sometimes also in families is the narrative from the perspective of the powerful, and in many cases the narratives and experiences of the exploited, racialized, enslaved, and colonized people do not find their way into the pages of official history or education, except where they serve to illustrate the prowess of the elites.

Educating ourselves on the enduring pervasive impacts of enslavement and colonialism in our faith and social structures can help us identify the limitations, obstacles, and constraints imposed on racialized and marginalized communities. Re-educating ourselves also helps in mitigating the unconscious biases and microaggressions that we were exposed to through education.

Education provides a foundation that empowers all to realize their shared responsibility and to build empathy and compassion that inspires meaningful action in addressing systemic inequities.

**Through education, Europe and North America have been responsible for the epistemicide (genocide of epistemologies) and spiritualicide (genocide of indigenous spiritualities) across the world. Is our theology, mission, and service continuing the epistemicide and spiritualicide or rehabilitating alternative epistemologies and spiritualities?**

## Awareness

Understanding and acknowledging the complexity of our differences is paramount to confronting our biases. The lack of understanding and acknowledgement has led to increased incidences of mental health issues, exacerbated by societal inequities that have disproportionately burdened and affected Blacks and racialized people, for example.

It is not enough, nor desirable for us, not to acknowledge the differences that exist between us; we all can see, literally and metaphorically. It is, however not desirable to read more into our differences like our ancestors did in the past, and some of us continue to do currently. Most of our differences are due to environmental adaptations. We are one family created by God.

Raising awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion helps organizations understand how prejudice manifests in our world through both overt and covert actions, through microaggressions and systemic barriers, and through conscious and unconscious biases.

Through awareness-raising in communities, we can reduce the instances of unconscious biases and prejudices, which in turn will improve the quality of allyship that we all can play. Doing this will also minimize the diversionary tactics of always expanding the pool of diversities for the sole purpose of trivializing the diversity that is critical in your specific community.

**Has your organization ever held a diversity, equity, and inclusion workshop for staff or clients? Has the organization done a diversity, equity, and inclusion audit?**

## Prevention

While we seek curative interventions for the centuries of racially motivated enslavement, colonization, exploitation, mission, *diakonia*, humanitarian assistance/response/development cooperation, and theological education, we must not forget to invest in preventing history from repeating itself in the future.

Prevention of discrimination can be achieved through policy changes that challenge our unconscious biases. The following steps can contribute immensely to preventing the atrocities of the past from being repeated in the future:

- an intentional independent DEI audit
- an intentional (internal or external) policy review
- intentional internal trainings to upskill staff and governing bodies
- policy reform

These steps are not conceptualized as one-off events but processes that organizations must institute consistently until they become normal processes and part of the culture of the institution, done at regular intervals.

**Are your organization's current non-discrimination policy and code of conduct adequate to address cases of unconscious biases and microaggressions?**

## Intervention

It is not enough to simply understand, be aware of, and prevent inequities. Those who witness bias or experience microaggressions must be accountable and call it out to help restore the environment when incidents of racism, xenophobia, or casteism occur. Perpetrators of bias or microaggression must also be held accountable. Increasing diversity can be an essential intervention in our hiring practices.

Understanding history that includes the historical mistreatment of certain groups can provide insights to the way people interact with our ministries and services throughout the world and within our organizations. This intervention to bring about change is pivotal to supporting those who experience structural inequities. The following steps are important as part of systematic and structured interventions an institution can make to address inequities:

- Conduct DEI audits to help expose *what is*, as opposed to *what ought to be*.
- Conduct DEI audits to facilitate the process of institutional policy and practice reforms.
- Repair the hurt done in the past, individually and collectively, to the injured group.
- Institute internal trainings for staff and clients to raise awareness and increase DEI literacy and accountability.

**Are there established models for redress for those who experience bias and microaggressions in your organization?**







# Identifying Priorities to Build a DEI Lens

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Leadership plays an important role in leading the charge for equity and inclusion within our organizations and in driving lasting change. Silence from leaders when incidents of racism or sexism occur does not send the right signals to the community. Conflict needs to be addressed early through an active commitment to address incidents when they occur and to promote accountability.

If staff feel that people are not being held responsible for injustices in the workplace or community, this may impede the reporting of poor behaviour and result in staff being less vigilant about their own actions.

- Move away from our ideals to our reality on DEI, look at the numbers, and listen to the stories.
- Understand whether failures are interpersonal or systemic and institutional.
- Develop a clear mechanism for addressing and resolving instances of individual failures within the organization.
- Develop a clear mechanism for addressing and reforming systemic failures through policy and systems reform.
- Develop an accountability mechanism through which staff and institutions are held accountable.

## Destigmatizing DEI

Applying a DEI lens does not need to be confrontational or scary. Once we understand why this work is needed from a Christian conduct and justice biblical standpoint, anchored in the life of Christ, it allows more discussion and potential openness to address DEI.

- Diversity proceeds from God. (Gen. 1:27)
- Equity is a principle that runs through the entire Bible. (Is. 11:6-9)
- Inclusion is at the core of the various commissions of Christians in the New Testament. (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:7-8)

In and of itself, there is nothing unchristian about DEI; however, DEI does not mean the exact same thing across different contexts. What is important is understanding: What identities or identity markers are excluded or marginalized in our context? In what ways are some people being unfairly treated in our context? What can we do to make the marginalized people feel and see that they belong with everyone in our context?



It's important to build internal and external support networks and to tap into resources, literature, podcasts, and educators to build awareness. Once the anti-bias toolkit is acculturated throughout the organization, the following five priorities may support ongoing learning in the organization.

## **Priority 1: Commit to bold leadership and accountability**

Leaders must take the reins and be held accountable for workplace and community behaviour to ensure all operate with a DEI lens.

### *Actions*

- Foster an environment free from inequity and systemic barriers.
- Encourage a crosscutting deployment of a DEI lens in all WCC, member church, ecumenical partner, and specialized ministries programmes, policies, and procedures.
- Through the organization's annual events, integrate a DEI session to build conversations and competencies, including HR actions to recruit, coach, and develop staff.
- Enforce zero tolerance for all instances of racism, xenophobia, and related discrimination.
- Develop and strengthen workplace policies regarding DEI.

## Empathy and Understanding—Listen and Act accordingly

### Self-Awareness and Continuous Learning

## Priority 2: Ensure all employees understand DEI

Many individuals do not understand the structures of power that shape the lives of racialized communities. Ensuring that all staff commit to taking an active role in learning about equity, inclusion, and diversity that can equip them to acknowledge, disrupt, and dismantle racist acts, ideologies, and practices in the organization is essential.

Silence and inaction cannot be tolerated as it serves to create limitations on staff that can be unsafe and traumatizing. As such, the ongoing DEI literacy of all staff will be a priority to ensure the organization understands DEI in theory and practice.

### *Actions*

- Mandate professional development for leaders and staff specific to their roles and responsibilities. This will develop DEI literacy along with the knowledge and competence to support the implementation of action.
- Develop a standard, modular, mandatory DEI curriculum for all employees that will evolve every year based on feedback and developing needs.
- Foster the skills of both leaders and staff to ensure inclusive conversations to build brave, safe spaces and identify biases in support of inclusive recruitment practices and processes.
- Create innovative ways to learn, including reading materials, discussions, and independent interactive online tools that are easily accessible.

## Cultural Intelligence—Strive to understand others

## Priority 3: Implement DEI Champions

At WCC, we acknowledge the importance of accessibility, accountability, education, and reliable, responsive service principles to deliver our services.

Acknowledge and recognize DEI Champions among staff and partners to build a strong support network in the workplace and wider community.

*Actions*

- Develop and pilot a network of DEI Champions to provide culturally relevant support groups and safe spaces for racialized and marginalized staff and partners. This will help foster psychologically and physically safe environments where all staff feel valued and respected in the workplace, are treated fairly, have the support to thrive, and are encouraged to express diverse opinions without fear of reprisal.
- Provide workshops on topics such as “Jesus and Social Justice,” “I Am My Brother’s Keeper,” and “A United Kingdom of God.”

**Collaborative Decision Making—No level or identity is unimportant****Advocating for Inclusivity**

All educational workshops are to reinforce biblical teachings of building community to understand best how microaggressions, discrimination, harassment, trauma, and mental health play out in the organization.

**Priority 4: Improve recruitment, retention, and progression of Black, racialized, and marginalized staff**

Many Black and racialized people are underemployed, under-remunerated, and undervalued. This is linked in part to the underrepresentation of Black and racialized staff in leadership roles as well as historic policies that privileged some staff while racially disadvantaging Black staff.


*Actions*

- Explore opportunities to identify talent from external organizations serving underrepresented groups.
- Create a DEI career framework to help employees establish their career paths and identify the skills, experience, and competencies required to achieve their goals.
- Establish commitments for management and executives to coach and develop Black and racialized staff.
- Create a simple salary schedule with no room for disparities between people in the same category of employment or a transparent system that allows access to information internally.

**Unbiased Communication and Action—Respectful and No Stereotypes!****Mentorship and Development Opportunities****Priority 5: Implement mental health support systems as part of DEI conditioning**

Racism and other forms of injustice are daily occurrences that erode the mental health of the individual as well as the collective mental health and well-being of the organization. The disproportionate level of emotional, psychological, and intellectual distress that people face requires unique approaches to wellness within the organization. Recognizing that racism has a significant impact on the psyche of individuals means bringing in mental health support systems.

*Actions*

- Provide culturally relevant mental health services and community resources as a key priority.
  - Offer referrals and access to faith-based mental health professionals.
  - Partner with racialized mental health support systems in the community.
  - Implement racial trauma education to raise awareness.
  - Offer education on stigma and the intersection of racism and mental wellness.
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# Conclusion

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The status quo is no longer acceptable. Bold change is needed. We must focus on creating systemic changes to confront inequities in these unprecedented times. People's mental health is failing, and if left unchecked, this can lead to devastating consequences.

Developing a DEI lens will help organizations address low employee morale, stress, and diminished performance on the job, as well as get a better handle on the post-pandemic phenomena of quiet quitting and the loss of talent as high-performing employees provide minimum performance on the job or seek opportunities elsewhere where they feel valued.





# Appendix: Bible Study Template

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1. To do a Bible study, it is important to have someone take leadership as the session facilitator. To be a facilitator, one does not need to be a professional scholar of the Bible; any user of the Bible can facilitate a Bible study.
2. Invite staff and community members to participate in the Bible study and propose times that are comfortable for most participants (lunch hour, soon after the end of the workday, mid-week evenings, weekends, or similar).
3. Together with the group, discuss and agree on a text of the Bible that you would want to study or a theme based on your experiences in the community or workplace that you would want to discuss in the light of the Bible. If you choose a theme, also choose a Bible text that you would want to use in the study.
  - a. **Text:** Proverbs 21:3: “To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.”
  - b. **Theme:** Localization of diaconal service.

Encourage participants to do some prior reading and research on the text and/or theme (as applicable) to facilitate a constructive and deep study session. Encourage participants to read larger portions or whole chapters before and after the selected text where possible.

4. Find an appropriate venue for the group to meet in a place that is easily accessible to all participants, including participants with disabilities.
5. On the day and time appointed for the Bible study, you can choose to begin by focusing on the biblical text, especially when only a biblical text has been chosen, or you can begin with a discussion of the context, especially when a theme has been chosen to guide the study. The following two blocks of questions—the first looking at the text and the second at the context—can help guide the session:
  - a. What do we know about the text (book, author, time of authorship, main themes of the book)?
  - b. Who are the characters in the chosen text (even if it is one verse, focus only on this verse), both those explicitly mentioned and those implied? Among the characters, which characters are active and which characters are passive? Whose view (active or passive) is dominant in the text?

- c. What problem is being addressed in the text, and how is it resolved or addressed?
- d. Can this text, especially the problem identified and addressed, help us make our community or workplace more welcoming to marginalized communities or make us more understanding of our own mission and work?

**OR**

- e. What approach to diaconal service is being used by Christian-based diaconal actors? What is localization? Why are some calling for localization? What are the existential dangers for your organization if they embrace localization?
  - f. What does the Bible, the chosen text, say about the idea of localization for your organization and for the people you work with in other communities? Try to identify principles from the chosen text that can help a Christian process the idea of localization as opposed to, for example, white saviourism?
  - g. How does the chosen text of the Bible challenge you to rethink your approach to diaconal service or mission?
6. Agree on the date of the next session, the text or theme (or both) for that session, and who will facilitate the session.







# List of Images

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**Cover Image:** Participants sing during the opening prayer of the WCC 11th Assembly on 31 August 2022. © Paul Jeffrey/WCC

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**Page 6:** Maliwa Excellent of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina holds the Bible in St Pierre Cathedral in Geneva during the WCC Central Committee 21–27 June 2023. © Albin Hillert/WCC

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**Page 16:** Opening dramatic performance by participants in the Ecumenical Youth Gathering (youth pre-assembly), from a diversity of countries and church traditions, during a thematic plenary focused on ‘Affirming the Wholeness of Life’, at the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. © Albin Hillert/WCC

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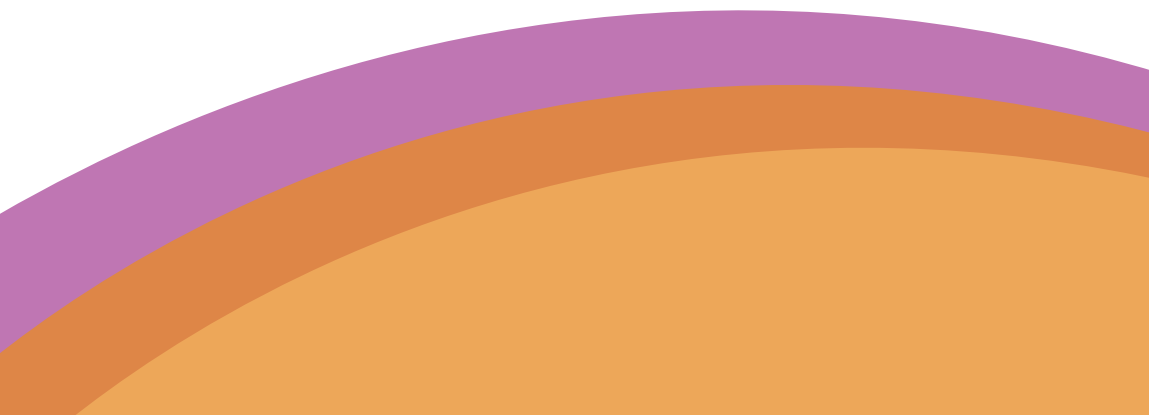
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**Page 36:** Prof. Dr. Esther Moraa Mombo speaks at a meeting of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute at the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany 7 September 2022. © Mike DuBose/WCC

**Page 39:** Canon Dr Agnes Abuom Moderator of the WCC and then President of EKD and now Moderator of the WCC, Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm at the Walk of Peace, Amsterdam, the Netherlands 23 August 2018. © Albin Hillert/WCC

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**Back Cover Image:** Canon Dr Agnes Abuom, Moderator of the WCC in an audience with Pope Francis at the Vatican with WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit 24 August 2017. © Francesco Sforza/Vatican Photographic Service









Unconscious biases and microaggressions are being experienced by many people in society, as well as in faith communities. Faith-based and related workplaces are not immune to these attitudes and practices. While significant investment has gone into mitigating conscious biases, racism, xenophobia, casteism and discrimination, the impact of unconscious biases and microaggressions are equally destructive. This toolkit invites and challenges Christians to intentionally invest in mitigating unconscious biases and microaggressions by employing a diversity, equity and inclusion lens in policies, practices and programming. Inclusive cultures in community and workplaces are more desirable and Christ-like.



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