

RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY 2023



STEPHEN LAWRENCE

A call to Remember, Reflect and Respond to racial justice matters
on the 30th anniversary of the murder
of Stephen Lawrence who died on 22 April 1993

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RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY 2023

STEPHEN LAWRENCE

But let justice roll on like
a river, righteousness like
a never-failing stream!

Amos 5:24

Foreword by Baroness Doreen Lawrence

Racial Justice Sunday began in 1995, two years after my son Stephen Lawrence was murdered by a group of racist men at a bus stop in London on 22 April 1993. Since that night, I have campaigned for justice for Stephen and dedicated my life to building a more equitable society in his name.

Justice, in religion, law and ethics, is the principle of making right, centered on the idea that we should each have access to that which we deserve. My fight for justice for Stephen, in many ways, has been a fight for justice for us all, and is driven by a core belief that every person, regardless of their background, should have the opportunity and support to flourish in a society that treats them with kindness, fairness and respect.

While much has changed in the 30 years since Stephen's death, too many things have not. Too many young people still struggle to succeed because they are disadvantaged by factors beyond their control, and too many of the institutions upon which they should be able to rely, are still infected with institutional racism and the structures of bias and discrimination that uphold it.

The most profound social justice issues of our time demand a collective response. We must come together in coalition with brothers and sisters from across the Christian community and beyond, to ensure that the church itself is reflective of the society we hope to build for future generations, working together to end racism and discrimination in all its forms.

Stephen's story is both challenging and inspirational. He was a normal young person who made the most of everyday opportunities. Young people today may not yet have heard the name Stephen Lawrence, but his story is as relevant today as it has ever been. Racial Justice Sunday is a vital strand of the legacy of hope and change that has been carved in Stephen's name. It is my hope that this resource provides the inspiration, tools and support to empower you to take an active role in anti-racism in your communities.

The essence of Stephen's legacy is encapsulated in the partnership between Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation. Through this work, and with your support, we will ensure that Stephen's story continues to inspire change for generations to come.

Baroness Doreen Lawrence



It is my hope that this resource provides the inspiration, tools and support to empower you to take an active role in anti-racism in your communities.

Introduction

Welcome to this year's Racial Justice Sunday resource. 22 April 2023 marks the 30th anniversary of the racist killing of Black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, in Eltham, southeast London. For those not familiar with this tragic event, Stephen was an 18-year-old student who was studying for his A levels; he aspired to be an architect. On the evening of 22 April 1993, a group of White youths attacked Stephen, as well as his friend, Duwayne Brooks, at a bus stop in Eltham as they were on their way home. Stephen died as a result of this racist attack.

The Metropolitan Police's investigation into the killing has now gone down as being both infamous and scandalous. Although there were several eyewitnesses to the killing and anonymous tip-offs as to the identity of the gang of killers, the police chose not to initially follow up any of them. A later investigation revealed they were training their attention on the actual Lawrence family. The Lawrences' case also came to the attention of South African President and freedom fighter Nelson Mandela, who supported the family in their campaign for justice.

Although youths were arrested, two of whom were charged, on 29 July 1993 the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) dropped all charges, citing insufficient evidence. The following year the CPS stated it did not have sufficient evidence for murder charges to be brought against anyone else, despite a belief by the Lawrence family that new evidence had been found.

In September 1994, the Lawrences initiated a private prosecution against the five suspects, establishing a 'fighting fund' for the prosecution as they were not entitled to legal aid. On 23 April 1996, almost three years to the day of Stephen's death, the remaining suspects were acquitted of murder by a jury at the Central Criminal Court. An inquest into Stephen's death in February 1997 returned a verdict of unlawful killing, leading to renewed efforts by the family for justice, and strong public opinions rose against the accused and the police who had handled the case.

In July 1997, the then British Home Secretary, Jack Straw, ordered an inquiry into the killing. This was known as the Macpherson Report and was completed in February 1999. The report led to an overhaul of Britain's race relations legislation, which created the strongest anti-discrimination powers in western Europe. Equally, as part of the findings on the Lawrence case, the Macpherson Report recommended that the rule against double jeopardy (the common law rule that once acquitted an accused person could not be tried a second time for the same crime) should be repealed in murder cases, and that it should be possible to subject an acquitted murder suspect to a second trial if 'fresh and viable' new evidence later comes to light.

As a result of the Lawrences' tireless campaigning for their son's killers to be brought to justice, two of Stephen's assailants were convicted of his murder – 18 years after the crime – through a change in the double jeopardy laws, which the couple helped bring about.

At the time of Stephen's killing, the Lawrences (Doreen, Neville and their three children, Stephen, Stuart and Georgina) worshipped at Trinity Methodist Church in Plumstead, near to their home in Woolwich. Appalled by the nature of the murder and the bungled police efforts to capture the killers, Methodist ministers supported the Lawrence family's justice campaign. This support would result in the establishment of Racial Justice Sunday (RJS) in 1995, which would later be mainstreamed by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), in 1998, as an occasion for the churches in Britain and Ireland to collectively focus on racial justice. It began in 1995, and generally took place on the second Sunday in September. In 2017, a decision was taken to move the date to the second Sunday in February (a direct swap with Education Sunday, which was then in February).

Racial Justice Sunday resources are produced by CTBI's sponsoring churches. These materials will enable you to Remember, Reflect and Respond to racial justice matters:

- **Remember** the importance of racial justice;
- **Reflect** on human diversity and thank God for it;
- **Respond** by working to end injustice, racism and ignorance through prayer and action.

So, in many respects, RJS is one of the many legacies of Stephen Lawrence's life. As such, in marking RJS, churches are remembering a young man who in life aspired to be an architect, but whose legacy has seen him become an architect for justice, equality, dignity and unity.

This anniversary is a key moment for church and society on these islands. Stephen's killing was very much Britain's 'George Floyd moment' as it clearly revealed the ugly face of British racism, in terms not only of the hatred of those who took this young man's life, but also of the institutional variety that characterised the appalling investigation into his killing. Akin to all such tragedies, it is a moment for reflection which will enable us to assess what, if any, progress has been made since that tragedy.



Newspaper reporting on the release of the Macpherson Report, February 25, 1999

Therefore, this year's resource will provide readers with opportunities to pray and take action on racial justice-related matters. The first part of the resource includes excellent liturgical and creative prayers prepared by Phill Melstrom, the Worship Development Worker at the Church of Scotland. This material provides multifarious entry points for any engagement with the subject matter. Equally, we have outstanding worship-related material written by Mark Sturge, a prime mover with Black Majority Churches that will resonate especially with those from Pentecostal congregations. Both items capture the richness and diversity of devotions and worship in our churches.

The second part of the resource includes a variety of reflections from Christians who were around at the time of Stephen Lawrence's killing. It also features contributions from younger racial justice champions who reflect on what Stephen's murder means to them as Christians living in a world that is still grappling with racial justice.



Richard Reddie

Director of Justice and Inclusion
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Contributors

As usual, this resource is very much the product of ecumenical cooperation and partnership between Christian church denominations, parachurch organisations, community groups and individuals in Wales, Scotland, Ireland and England – the four nations.

Given the importance of racial justice in church and society, it is imperative that churches work together, and with others, in Britain and Ireland to address prevailing inequalities. Equally, when churches – in particular – focus on a specific theme for Racial Justice Sunday, it not only enables them to laser in on a certain matter of concern, but it also allows them to redouble their collective efforts to address this.

This year, we are particularly grateful for the support and partnership of the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation, whose amazing work ensures that Stephen's life is remembered and his legacy is pursued. It is indeed an honour to have Baroness Doreen Lawrence write the foreword for the resource. The Baroness' courage, determination and strength (in the fight for justice) have been a source of inspiration for many in church and society over several decades.

Therefore, the following individuals are to be thanked for their sterling contributions:

Karen Campbell, *Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries (Mission), United Reformed Church*

Canon Aled Edwards, OBE, *Outgoing Chief Executive of Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales and Secretary of the Interfaith Council for Wales*

Dionne Gravesande, *Principal Adviser for Ecumenical Relations and Theology at Christian Aid*

Revd David Haslam, *Retired Methodist Minister and former Churches Commission for Racial Justice Secretary*

Jennifer Laurent-Smart, *Equality and Diversity Manager for The Salvation Army, United Kingdom and Ireland Territory*

Baroness Doreen Lawrence *and the Stephen Lawrence Foundation*

Dr Eleasah Phoenix Louis, *Researcher and resource developer exploring racial justice*

Phill Melstrom, *Worship Development Worker, The Church of Scotland*

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Revd Sivakumar Rajagopalan, *Baptist Minister in Greater London*

Professor Anthony G. Reddie, *Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture, Regent's Park College, The University of Oxford*

Revd Paul Rochester, *General Secretary of the Free Churches Group*

Linbert Spencer, OBE, *Writer and consultant on racial justice matters*

Mark Sturge, *PhD student at Durham University*

Yogi Sutton, *Chair, Catholic Association for Racial Justice*

Revd Dr Sahr John Yambasu, *Methodist Minister in Ireland*

SECTION 1: **Worship Resources**

A selection of Liturgical and Creative Prayers and
Ideas, Hymns, Readings, Scripture Verses and
Songs for use in worship.

OPENING PRAYERS

Gracious and loving God,
We gather together today to mark this Racial Justice Sunday.
We recall the tragedy of a young life cut short –
with the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence.
Even 30 years on, we lament the sin of racism,
so prevalent in our society and in our world.
We bring to mind the senseless killing of George Floyd
And we feel the need for change.



Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayers for an end to racism.

Lord, in Your grace,
Open our hearts and provoke us to respond with action.

Lord in Your righteous anger,
Empower Your prophets to speak truth to power.

Lord, in Your love,
Bind us together in solidarity, with a shared vision
to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly towards an end to racism
and into Your Kingdom of love made real here on earth.

Amen

GATHERING PRAYER

BASED ON A PRAYER BY REVD DR MARTIN LUTHER KING JNR

Eternal God,
out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence
the whole universe came into being,
draw us together in love and unity for one another.
Help us to first see our own dignity and to unconditionally love ourselves.
Give us the strength to love our neighbours,
and the courage to go the extra mile and love our enemies.
The history of our lives is the history of eternal revolt against You,
So, in the light of Your grace and mercy,
may we learn to love You with all of our hearts, souls and minds.
May we forgive just as You forgive us for what we could have been,
but failed to be.
Give us minds to know Your will,
Give us hearts to love Your will,
Give us the devotion to live out Your ways,
and to be all that we were made to be,
In the name of the Spirit of Jesus we pray.

Amen

CALL TO WORSHIP/OPENING RESPONSES

ONE:

God of welcome/love,
You call us into Your presence,
Gathered one and all
In the richness and beauty of diversity that You willed into being.
We bring our voices together in harmony with Yours
As we gather to worship You.

**One God,
Father, Son and Spirit/Creator, Saviour and Spirit.**

Or

**As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be:
World without end.**

[use as per your convention]

TWO:

Leader: Gather us into Your presence,

All: Trinity of love, God in Community.

Leader: May the dust from the journey be washed away,

All: Trinity of love, God in Community.

Leader: May you know the hospitality of our Creator,

All: Trinity of love, God in Community.

Leader: May the weight of the world be held by our Redeemer,

All: Trinity of love, God in Community.

Leader: May we be inspired by the falling of Your Spirit in this place,

All: Trinity of love, God in Community.

THREE:

Worthy of praise from every mouth,
Of confession from every tongue,
Of worship from every living thing,
Is Your glorious name.
Creator, Saviour, Spirit – One God eternal.

You created –
And call us to be creative in seeking justice and an end to racism.
You redeemed –
And call us to forgive, just as You forgive us for what we could have been,
but failed to be.
You live and move –
And call us to action with You as co-creators of Your way and realm of love.

Come one and come all,
Let us praise God together.

Amen

FOUR:

Leader:

God breathed all into life,

All:

All of creation, diverse and beautiful.

Leader:

How good and how wonderful it is

All:

To worship God in spirit and truth.

Leader:

Faith, love and hope come together in this place;

All:

Justice and peace embrace.

Leader:

We worship God together.

All:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Amen

A LITANY FOR THOSE NOT READY FOR HEALING

Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fulness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Let us not rush to offer a sticking plaster, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.

Let us not offer false equivalencies, thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance in a particular historical moment.

Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.

Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child... someone's beloved son.

Let us not value property over people; let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.

Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice.

Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness and the pain that is life in community together.

Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts are being torn asunder. Instead...

Let us mourn Black and Brown men and women, those killed extrajudicially every 28 hours.

Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer who described him as a demon.

Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.

Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease and to sit in the ashes of this nation's original sin.

Let us be silent when we don't know what to say.

Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbours and friends.

Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase.

Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground.

Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.

God, in Your mercy,

Show me my own complicity in injustice,

Convict me for my indifference,

Forgive me when I have remained silent,

Equip me with a zeal for righteousness,

Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness.

© Dr Yolanda Pierce

CONFESSION AND LAMENT

Leader: Loving God,
Before You and Your people I confess to my failings –
To the wounding of myself, of others and of our shared home.

**All: May the ever-loving God forgive you.
May the suffering Christ sustain you.
May the Holy Spirit enrich you.**

Leader: Loving God,
Before You and Your people I confess to my failings –
To my complicities in practices and systems
That denigrate and strip away the dignity of others.

**All: May the ever-loving God forgive you.
May the suffering Christ sustain you.
May the Holy Spirit enrich you.**

Leader: Loving God,
Before You and Your people I confess to my failings –
To getting in the way of love and hindering the furtherance of
Your Kingdom of love, peace and justice for all.

**All: May the ever-loving God forgive you.
May the suffering Christ sustain you.
May the Holy Spirit enrich you.**

Leader: And now, you the people:

**All: Loving God,
Before You and Your people I confess to my failings –
To the wounding of myself, of others and of our shared
home.**

Leader: May the ever-loving God forgive you.
May the suffering Christ sustain you.
May the Holy Spirit enrich you.

**All: Loving God,
Before You and Your people I confess to my failings –
To my complicities in practices and systems
That denigrate and strip away the dignity of others.**



Leader: May the ever-loving God forgive you.
May the suffering Christ sustain you.
May the Holy Spirit enrich you.

**All: Loving God,
Before You and Your people I confess to my failings –
To getting in the way of love and hindering the furtherance
of Your Kingdom of love, peace and justice for all.**

Leader: May the ever-loving God forgive you.
May the suffering Christ sustain you.
May the Holy Spirit enrich you.
We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

PRAYER

God of mercy,
Where are You?
Where are You
When the violence erupts and hate spills over?
When the words of hatred spew and tumble from angry, misguided mouths?
When the air is filled with bitterness and thick with hate and it is so hard to breathe?

God of justice,
Where are You?
Where are You
When the picket lines are formed and people have to march in protest to be heard?
When it is no longer only words that are weaponised against those who are seen to be different?
When blow after blow is dealt and people are bruised?

God of hope,
Where are You?
Where are You
When unjust systems are upheld and decisions are made that oppress?
When division and denigration are more apparent than dignity?
When humanity and beauty are violated by senseless violence and hatred?

How long, O Lord, must there be suffering?
How long, O Lord, must there be violence?
How long, O Lord, must we wait for a brighter day?
How long, O Lord?
How long?

Thirty years have passed
Since a young man – Stephen Lawrence – was murdered.
God of mercy,
We pray for Stephen's family – may they know Your peace that surpasses all understanding.
God of justice,
We pray for all those affected by the sin of racism – may they know Your strength and protection.
God of hope,
We pray for the work of the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation, and for other organisations, charities, workers and people dedicated to the work of anti-racism – may they be strengthened and empowered in their work of building Your Kingdom.

THANKSGIVING

God of life and love,
In Your infinite wisdom
You created all things to live in harmony.
You choose to make us in the image of the Creator of the cosmos –
Born of the same imagination
And lovingly crafted from the same dust,
You breathed all peoples into being,
Blessing us with different gifts and talents,
A tapestry of cultures and stories
Interwoven into Your story of all creation.

We thank You for our world,
Tired and groaning though it may be,
But it is still beautiful and filled with so much potential
To reflect and display Your Glory.
Help us to work together for the care of our shared home.
We thank You that You have blessed us with each other,
Every nation and community, filled with beautiful and gifted people,
Each called to be fully who You made them to be,
And all called to be co-workers with You.

We thank You for the gift of immigrants and refugees
And the many blessings they bring to our communities.

We thank You for the gift of our young people,
Filled with hopes and fears, dreams and ambitions –
May they inspire and challenge us to be better.

We thank You for those who have been in our communities for many years,
The storykeepers and griots, the history makers and caretakers –
May their experience and wisdom enrich our lives.

We thank You for the diverse nature of Your people,
Each imbued with dignity and each worthy of value and respect.
Thank You for inspiring so many to lift up their voices against the sin of racism.
But we still lament that there are so many voices silenced or ignored,
Shouted over or made to feel irrelevant.
Move in power, God of justice,
So that we would no longer have to witness violence and loss of life,
As with the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence;
So that we would no longer have to witness miscarriages of justice and misuses
of power,
As with the unlawful killing of George Floyd;
So that we would no longer have to fight against systems of control and oppression
To make people understand that every human being has dignity
That needs to be seen, recognised and respected.

Lord, we thank You that we can meet together
And give thanks and praise for the progress made,
That we can sing in protest of injustice,
That we can cry out in anguish, giving voice to our lament,
That we can pray in hope together for a better future.
We seek the power of Your Holy Spirit
To guide, empower and sustain us.

Amen

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS (INTERCESSION)

*This prayer can be used to help people reflect and express their own prayers.
You can use a short song or chorus to help people pray.*

God of all people,
Hear our prayers for mercy.
We cry to You for help in such a time of trouble.
We have fallen short of Your hopes and dreams for us.
We can see so many in our communities treading water;
We can see so many starting to struggle in the depths of despair and debt;
We can see so many affected by issues in society that we could play our part in
mending;
Yet we don't do enough.
We come to You, Merciful God, seeking forgiveness.

[hold a space where people can silently seek forgiveness]

God of mercy,
Hear our prayers.

God of all people,
Hear our prayers for mercy.
We come to You, Lord,
You who are sovereign over all,
And we ask that You would draw the whole world together,
Casting out the evils of prejudice and arrogance that cause hatred and oppression.
We long for Your justice and peace in our nation and world.
We come to You, Merciful God, seeking justice.

[hold a space for people to reflect on or to name some current situations from
the news/local community/wider society where we hope to see God's justice]

God of justice,
Hear our prayer.



God of all people,
Hear our prayers of hope.
We come to You, Lord,
You whose love is without limit and without end,
And we ask that You help us to open our hearts, minds and wills to You,
As we hope for the day
When we can live as members of one family at home in the world.
We come to You, Merciful God, in hope.

[hold a space where people can speak out or sing out words of hope]

God of mercy,
Hear our prayer.
God of justice,
Answer our prayers.
God of hope,
Inspire us anew.
Amen

REFLECTIVE PRAYER/RESPONSE

Creator,
We call on Your Spirit to expand our imaginations,
That we might all see a better future.

Silence is held

[instruction – you are invited to hope, dream and imagine that future in the presence of God]

Maker,
We call on Your Spirit to unite and guide us,
That we might be co-workers in building a better way of being.

Silence is held

[instruction – you are invited to ask God for strength and guidance about how you might be a co-worker]

Artist,
We call on Your Spirit to fill this place,
That our compassion and creativity might overflow.

Silence is held

[instruction – you are invited to seek the Holy Spirit for refreshing and revitalising]

Healer,
We call on Your Spirit to rest upon us,
That we may know Your tender mercy, care and healing.

Silence is held

[instruction – you are invited to sit with the suffering Christ and ask Him to reach out and heal a particular hurt]

Creator,
Maker,
Artist,
Healer,
Receive our prayers.

Amen

PRAYER FOR PEACE

Prince of Peace, hear our prayers.

Peace of Christ above all peace.

Peace between my conflicting selves;

Peace of Christ above all peace.

Peace between lovers and partners;

Peace of Christ above all peace.

Peace between parents and children;

Peace of Christ above all peace.

Peace between neighbours and nations;

Peace of Christ above all peace.

Peace in our church and our communities;

Peace of Christ above all peace.

PRAYER

BASED ON THE SARUM PRAYER

Leader: Help us to raise our awareness of racism.

All: God be in my head – and in my understanding.

Leader: Help us to see and to recognise the dignity and value of all people.

All: God be in my eyes – and in my looking.

Leader: Help us to speak out against hatred, division and racism.

All: God be in my mouth – and in my speaking.

Leader: Help us to be compassionate to all affected by racism and hatred.

All: God be in my heart – and in my thinking.

Leader: Help us to go out into the world, doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly.

All: God be at my end – and in my departing.

BLESSINGS/DISMISSAL/SENDING PRAYERS

A FRANCISCAN BENEDICTION

May God bless you with discomfort
At easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships,
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
At injustice, oppression and exploitation of people,
So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears
To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war,
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them
And turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done
To bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.
Amen

BLESSING

BASED ON MICAH 6:8

God has told us what is good,
Made known what is required of all of us.
So, God of immeasurable love and power/imagination,
Empower and embolden us,
as we go from this place –
to do justice,
to love kindness,
and to walk humbly.

Amen

PARTICIPATIVE SENDING PRAYER

Leader: As we go,
All: Send us out with Your might.

Leader: As we go,
All: Send us out with Your compassion.

Leader: As we go,
All: Send us out
Leader: to people and places that need Your love.
All: Send us out

Leader: to seek justice and to love mercy.
All: Send us out

Leader: to walk humbly.
All: We go in Your name for Your glory.
Amen

SENDING PRAYER/BLESSING

BASED ON A PRAYER BY MARTIN LUTHER KING

O God,
We thank You that You have inspired people in all nations and in all cultures.
We know that You are God eternal, living and moving – yesterday, today and forever.
May we follow You, committed to Your way of love and justice,
united in the desire to recognise and respect the dignity and worth of every human being.
In the name and the Spirit of Jesus.
Amen

CREATIVE PRAYER IDEAS

PRAYER STATIONS

BASED ON A PRAYER BY REVD DR MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

These prayer activities are based on a prayer by Martin Luther King. Each section of the prayer has an activity with it that you can use as part of a creative prayer gathering, as stations around your sanctuary or as activities/reflections to work through as home groups. Choose how you want to set them up – and be as creative as you like!

We thank You for Your church, founded upon Your Word,
That challenges us to do more than sing and pray,
But go out and work towards the very answer to our prayers.
Help us to realise that humanity was created to shine like the stars
And live on through all eternity.
Keep us, we pray, in perfect peace.
Help us to walk together, pray together, sing together and live together
Until that day when all God's children will rejoice
In one common band of humanity in the reign of God,
We pray.

Amen

ONE:

We thank You for Your church, founded upon Your Word.

What words can you think of that would describe the values you hope to see in your community? Write them on a large piece of paper in different colours.

TWO:

We thank You for Your church, founded upon Your Word,
That challenges us to do more than sing and pray,
But go out and work towards the very answer to our prayers.

Picture your community:

- *What are the places and situations where you long to see answers to prayer?*
- *As you walk/travel around your community, ask God what you should notice and what you should pray for.*
- *What activities can you think of that would help your community to embody their prayers and take action?*

THREE:

We thank You for Your church, founded upon Your Word,
That challenges us to do more than sing and pray,
But go out and work towards the very answer to our prayers.
Help us to realise that humanity was created to shine like the stars
And live on through all eternity.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Stephen's life was tragically cut short when, on 22 April 1993, he was murdered in an unprovoked racist attack. A young man with big dreams for his future, Stephen wanted to be an architect.

- *Reflect for a few moments – this bright young star was not allowed to shine any more.*
- *Create some shining stars together and write the names of people in your community that you would want to remember, to pray for and to thank God for. Stick them up on a wall, attach them to a prayer tree or hang them up and shine a light on them as you pray together.*
- *Reflect for a few moments – how might you empower other young people to shine like stars and achieve their dreams?*
- *What opportunities for education or advocacy for anti-racism could you explore with the young people in your community?]*

FOUR:

We thank You for Your church, founded upon Your Word,
That challenges us to do more than sing and pray,
But go out and work towards the very answer to our prayers.
Help us to realise that humanity was created to shine like the stars
And live on through all eternity.
Keep us, we pray, in perfect peace.

- *What are the different ways that we can all be peacemakers in our homes/churches/communities/nation/the world? Write them on a large piece of paper so you can see the ideas grow.*
- *Reflect for a few minutes – in what ways do you recognise that you have been a peacemaker?*
- *And what other ways of being a peacemaker can you try?*

FIVE:

We thank You for Your church, founded upon Your Word,
That challenges us to do more than sing and pray,
But go out and work towards the very answer to our prayers.
Help us to realise that humanity was created to shine like the stars
And live on through all eternity.
Keep us, we pray, in perfect peace.
Help us to walk together, pray together, sing together and live together
Until that day when all God's children will rejoice
In one common band of humanity in the reign of God,
We pray. Amen.

It is time for some rejoicing! Perhaps you could walk around your community and give thanks for all the diversity and beauty you recognise; perhaps you could hold a prayer event, or a time of singing praise and worship giving thanks for your community; perhaps you could have a church meal with lots of different cultures represented in the food and drink. AMEN!

CREATIVE PRAYER ACTIVITIES AND REFLECTIONS

Taken and adapted from the Church of Scotland's prayer book Pray Now, and WPCU 2019 'Only Justice'.

The meditations and activities below can be adapted for your context used as individual studies or as small group activities, or they can form the basis of creative prayer stations.

INTRODUCTION

The world is increasingly interconnected through the required resources all human beings have in common. Necessities such as physical shelter and sustenance, as well as global resources like power, water, and clean air cannot be denied as much needed, but are often unavailable to many.

When people have used all means at their disposal and when they face desperate and devastating circumstances, it is in these times that the human spirit comes into its own. Beyond material, beyond emotional, beyond humanity even, the spiritual dimension to life seems to make most sense when people feel they cannot go on, when human energy is spent and the weight of life's questions is too much.

It is in these moments that our spirituality is our greatest resource, as we connect what lies within us to the God who recreates, refreshes and restores.

The following prayers and activities are based on the themes of hope, peace, love, faith and justice.

Hope

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Peter 1:3).

There!
There, between the moment I call 'now'
And the moment that comes next,
Sits *hope*,
Between the days whose weight has borne down on us,
In lack of movement, lack of change,
The lumpen oppression of the 'aye been'
And the sheer terrorism of, 'And what's going to change?'
There hope sits.

For hope is the possibility that should not be,
That to this eternal, hopeless 'now',
Linked by steel chains to what was and what shall be,
'Same old same old. . .'
There is a beyond.
Whether we recognise it or not, Lord,
Hope is the mark of Your sovereignty, and our liberation.
Hope is *Your* gift.

There,
Between the faith that is trust
And the love that is self-giving,
Sits hope:
This trust, with only God for ground,
That things shall be different, and all things shall be new.
This knowing we are loved, that lets us love;
This knowing-without-seeing of what God is like;
Not fully, but in part.
Enough. . . to be getting on with. . .

Prayer activity

Sit in front of a wall in your home, or wherever you are, on the other side of which there is a space – a room or a corridor – which you know well enough to visualise clearly. The important thing is the wall and the known space on the other side of it.

Now sit before it, and still yourself. Look at the wall. Take in its features. Dwell on its solidity. Touch it, if you wish, and feel its reality, its actuality. Visualise what is on the other side of the wall. Do so in detail. Look again at the wall and grasp the fact that there is something beyond this. You may wish now to reflect on the Scripture passage, or think of more Scripture passages that speak of hope. How do they relate to the realisation that there is a 'beyond' to the human situations they invoke?

Peace

'And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4:7).

Lord, bless me with Your peace.
Centre me in Your love,
That I may be secure in whose I am.
Still my raging mind,
That I may be free to focus on what really matters.
Quieten my prodigal tongue,
That I may be careful in the words I choose.
Calm my body,
That I may be rested and ready to journey.
Open my heart,
That I may be responsive to those who need me.
Make me a well of Your peace.

Lord, bless me with Your peace,
And may that peace become hospitality for others.
May I offer serenity and security
To those who crave shelter from the storm.
May I be a discerning listener
To those who need to talk.
May I be a reconciling presence
To those who have their differences.
May the peace You have gifted me
Spill over into those I meet.
Make me a channel of Your peace.

Lord, bless me with Your peace.
But may that peace
Galvanise me to fight for world peace.
Take my mind and make it think about
How I can help others live with dignity.
Take my tongue and make it speak
For those who have no voice or power.
Take my body and send me out
To work against injustice and abuse.
Take my heart and make it bleed
For those who are broken by poverty.
Make me an instrument of Your peace.



Prayer activity

Take a moment of quiet.

Concentrate on your breathing.

See Jesus standing in front of you.

Jesus says, 'Peace be with you, . . .', and says your name.

Feel the peace of Christ wash over you.

Breathe in the peace of Christ, letting it fill the centre of your being.

Be at peace in the love that will never let you go.

Rest in that peace for a moment.

Reflect – What opportunities for peacemaking did you notice or become involved in today/this week?

Give thanks for the peace that was made or pray a simple prayer of 'Peace be with . . .', and say someone's name or name a situation.

Breathe in the peace of Christ, letting it fill the centre of your being.

Be at peace in the love that will never let you go.

Rest in that peace for a moment.

When you are ready, take that peace with you,

For Christ's peace has focused, strengthened and prepared you for whatever lies ahead.

Love

'And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love' (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Love,
A word thrown around every day.
I love your hair... I love coffee... I love that song...

I really do not like that, God, that over-the-top diluting of the word,
Because then, the word is inadequate
When the stomach flips
And breath is caught
And beauty is clear, as if for the first time, in clouds, flowers, sunsets.

'Love', over-used, quickly attributed,
Does not live up to
The confused realisation,
The subverted perspective,
The sacrificed ego when self fades from the fore.

'Love' – just another word
With conditions, comparisons, caution.

God who made love –
Not chemistry, biology, personality or history,
But mystery. . . *eros, philia, agape*.
Beyond hyperbole, beyond words at all,
Your love is all and more.
God who made love,
Show us again how love is great
So we can reclaim the word and the way.

Prayer activity

Love is complex and beautiful. Expressed and experienced in different ways, relationships and contexts. The Ancient Greeks had around 30 words to describe love in all its shades, as opposed to our singular word. Ask God to move you towards a deeper understanding of love (God is love), as you reflect on how you have experienced and expressed love in different ways.

Agape – the love of humanity:

The kind of love that connects us to others on the basis of our shared experience as human beings.

- Pray for our world and for an end to racism and hatred.

Storge – family love:

The love shared between those in a family context.

- Pray for your family and friends.



Pragma – love that endures:

The love between partners which develops over a long period of time – which endures in sickness and in health.

- Pray for those closest to you, or for someone whom God lays on your heart now.

Philautia – self-respect:

The love and care that we give to ourselves.

- Pray for yourself and for your journey with anti-racism.

Eros – romantic and erotic love:

Based on passion, attraction, magnetism and romance.

- Pray for what you feel is most appropriate here.

Philia – shared experience:

The love we feel for people we share a purpose or common goal with – our co-workers, teammates and colleagues.

- Pray for those who may be victims of racism within your communities.

Faith

(taken from **Pray Now** 2001, p 33)

*A man struggles with belief and says to Jesus, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'
(Mark 9:24).*

Lord of faith,
So often I struggle with what to believe;
The loose ends,
The unanswered questions,
The eternal 'Why?'
Too often I have little to say to those who ask
And find myself with the same doubts.
Why this tragedy?
Why that death?
Why the unfairness?
Why the disappointment?

I believe, but help my unbelief!

When I struggle with things too great,
When I feel unequal to the task,
When I reel from blows,
When the world goes dark,
Take me by the hand,
Lift me up,
That I may arise
And see the brightness of a new day,
The colours of creation,
The power of faith at work.

For me, and for all who struggle with their faith,
Bring that touch of belief
Which banishes the shadow of doubt,
That I may see, that I may believe.
Amen



Prayer activity

When times are hard, when there is so much going on in the world around us, it can be challenging to keep faith and to trust. Often faith can be described as the ability to believe in difficult things, but there is so much more to it than that. Faith is to trust in something deeper, more than a conviction. It is more profound than a sincerity of intention and more akin to fidelity and devotion. Faith is a gift from God. Faith can grow, and it can start as small as a mustard seed.

Faith can sustain us, it can uphold us, unite us and inspire us. Faith, we are told, can move mountains.

Reflect on these verses from Scripture – 2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1-3. What do they say to you about faith?

Reflect on/share a story of when you were faithful.

What do you need more faith for at the moment?

Ask God for the faith to. . . [what is your prayer?]

Justice

(Adapted from WPCU 2019, day 1 material)

'Let justice roll down like waters':

- Amos 5:22-25
- Luke 11:37-44

Reflection

At the table
We sit.
Empty plates, but for a few crumbs.
Everyone's had their fill again,
Satiated,
At least for now.

Turning on the taps,
We fill our bowls,
In the hope that the stains will disappear.
The water cascades
Over cup
And plate,
Cleansing it
Of any sign of human contact,
As if there had never been a meal.

In our polite conversation
And edgy discourse,
We fool ourselves
Into thinking we are making a difference.

We faithfully gather,
But are we just acting,
Waiting,
For the others to speak up
As we wash our hands?

Prayer

God of all,
You have shown us the path of justice.
You are the father of the orphan.
You are the constant companion of the widow.
You are the friend of the stranger.
In each of these,
May we meet You
And recognise the wind of Your Spirit,
Moving us toward the need for justice.
In all that we do,
May we know Your grace and mercy
And offer healing and justice in Your name.



Prayer activity

Find a picture or imagine a river in full flow. Picture yourself standing on the bank and spend some time reflecting on the power held within the water rushing past you – how it has grown from a tiny wellspring, gathering force as the rain and other streams join it on its journey towards the sea.

Now imagine the power of God's justice and righteousness like the river, sweeping away injustice and reforming the landscape.

Fill a jug or bottle full of water and take several empty glasses. Now pour the water evenly into each glass. Ensure that each glass has *exactly* the same amount of water.

Reflect or have a conversation:

- How much concentration and care did it take to make sure each glass contained exactly the same amount of water?
- How much more care do we need to take to ensure that there is equity and justice in our communities and society?
- How would you describe justice?
- Where have you recognised justice in action?

EXAMEN FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

The Examen is an ancient practice of prayerful reflection in the church that can help us see and discern God's presence and hand at work in our whole experience.

- Centre yourself – take a few minutes to be still; silence can help, or closing your eyes, or listening to some music.
- Get rooted – set your feet flat on the ground and consider that God, in the person of Jesus, walked on this same earth.
- Breathe – take a moment to notice your breathing.
- Let distractions fade – take a moment to notice the noise around you, notice it and let it fade into the background.
- Get comfortable – notice where you may be tense and try to relax and become as comfortable as possible wherever you are.

I give thanks to God for creation, for God's work in creating the beauty and diversity of all life.

- Where did I notice the presence of God in creation and in others today?

I ask for the grace to see others as God does.

- What beauty did I experience?
- Have I fully loved God and fully loved my neighbour as myself?

I ask for the grace to look closely to see how my life choices imprint upon other people.

- Have I caused pain to others by my actions or my words?
- Where did I leave a mark today?
- What left its mark on me?
- Where did I trespass?
- Where did I walk humbly?

I ask for grace as I recognise where I have fallen short in caring for others.

- Where did I hinder love, mercy and justice?
- Is there a root of racism within me that blurs my vision of who my neighbour is?
- Did I collude in, or witness, personal, institutional, systematic or social racism today?
- Have I done enough to inform myself about the sin of racism, its roots and its historical and contemporary manifestations?
- How have I opened my heart to see the dignity of others?
- How did I work towards restoration and justice?

I ask for the grace to reconcile my relationship with myself, with humanity, with creation and with God, and to stand in solidarity through my actions.

- How can I repair my relationship with, and make choices consistent with my desire for reconciliation with, myself, with humanity, with creation and with God?

INTRODUCTION

This Racial Justice Sunday Order of Service is prepared with Black Majority Churches in mind, and recognises that those most adversely affected by racism need to approach God on their own terms as children of God. Therefore, this Order of Service does not focus on anguish, annoyance, frustration or disappointment, but instead gazes on the grace of God. It imagines the freedom of living life in its fulness, without the limitations that racial prejudice imposes. It concentrates on Christ, who has placed His value in people of colour and clothes them in His worth.

CALL TO WORSHIP

A warm welcome to you here at [insert church name]. Today, churches the length and breadth of Britain and Ireland are marking Racial Justice Sunday.

As we worship, we remind ourselves of our duty towards each other – to be treated with dignity, respect and honour – because we are of infinite worth to God.

Racial Justice Sunday is not just an annual service; it is a signpost, a reminder, of how we should live the rest of the year and the rest of our lives.

Therefore, on this Racial Justice Sunday:

- We affirm our value in Christ;
- We affirm the humanity in which God has made us;
- We affirm the ethnicity in which God has moulded us;
- We affirm the gift we are to our families, communities and nations;
- We affirm that we are children of the Most High God.

Therefore,

Let us come boldly before God's throne in prayer, worship and thanksgiving.
Let us come in the rawness of our imperfections and with gratitude for Christ's forgiveness.

The congregation sings:

Be Still and Know

Be still and know that I am God,
Be still and know that I am God,
Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord that healeth thee,
I am the Lord that healeth thee,
I am the Lord that healeth thee.

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.

PRAYER/READING

In reverence of our mighty and everlasting God, who heals us, keeps our confidence, supports us in times of crisis and shares our joys, we say (pray) together:

Our God is King over all the earth.

Our God has made us a little lower than the angels.

Our God sent His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, into our unjust world.

Our Lord was rejected, suffered and died for our sins.

Our Lord rose again in triumph and ascended into heaven.

Our Lord now intercedes for us:

– for the forgiveness of our sin;

– for our faithfulness in adversity;

– for our welfare, well-being and wholeness;

– for our justice, mercy and grace.

Our Lord has sent His Holy Spirit

To help us, comfort us and guide us into all truth.

Come, Holy Spirit, help us, comfort us, guide us, we pray.

Amen

HYMNS

- Restore, O Lord, the Honour of Your Name
- I am Thine, O Lord

REFLECTION

This is an opportunity to reflect on the life of Stephen Lawrence, or the life of someone who has been adversely affected by the issues of racial injustice. It might also be a moment to reflect on how our merciful God can turn a harmful situation or intent into a positive outcome.

It is important to be aware and acknowledge that some in the congregation may be experiencing or carrying deep hurt. The hope for today is not to prolong or stir up feelings but to promote wholeness and healing through testimony and song.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP SONGS

- There Is None Holy as the Lord
- I Am Free
- I'm No Longer a Slave to Fear

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Before reading the Scriptures, the reader might say:

The 1804 Bible offered to 'Negro West Indians Slaves' omitted many chapters of the Bible that we have in our possession today. For example, the Book of Exodus contained only chapters 19 and 20; most chapters from Deuteronomy were omitted, including our text today; the entire Psalms and much more were also excluded.

Therefore, as we read this passage today, we remind ourselves that God's faithfulness had been hidden from some generations (our ancestors). We remind ourselves that people of every nation, tribe and tongue need to hear the good news of Christ, have access to the whole counsel of Scripture and experience the power of God's Word.

We read these words with confidence, humility and thankfulness; not as passive listeners but as sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ, who died to set us free from sin and reconcile us to God.

READING 1 – DEUTERONOMY 30:15-20

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

READING 2 – 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-9

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, 'I belong to Paul', and another, 'I belong to Apollos', are you not merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

THE SERMON

You Are God's Field

Each of us has identity markers. Our gender, DNA, ethnicity, fingerprints, religion, marital status, sexuality, socioeconomic status, education, family, profession, illnesses, disabilities, etc., all contribute to defining us. These identities exist, first and foremost, because we are human beings created in the likeness of God.

Throughout our lives, we are enculturated to confirm and affirm our human identities. We learn and are expected to demonstrate that we belong to a particular community, group or tribe. As we get older, we may challenge or affirm our tribe. We may choose to opt out of some identities and adopt new ones.

On the one hand, some parts of our identities, like our ethnicities, cannot be changed, even if they are used to demean or devalue us. On the other hand, we may choose to defend and protect our identities when they are attacked, abused, disrespected and devalued.

Make no mistake, each of us will be taking on and shedding new identities as long as we live.

Today our text brings into sharp focus our identity with Christ.

1 Corinthians 3 begins with the words, **'And so'**.

This beginning should spark our curiosity because these are connecting words. **'And so'** invites us to look in at least two directions. Looking forward, we might ask, 'And so what?'

However, we are also invited to look backwards, to take a peep and see what happened or was said in chapter 2.

So, let's go to chapter 2 for a brief moment.

Here, it seems, the Apostle Paul is laser-focused on the wisdom of this world and God's wisdom. Worldly leaders, he suggests, do not understand God's wisdom (verse 11). This is because God's wisdom is revealed wisdom and can only be known through God's Spirit (verse 12).

Yes! OK! But why is it so essential to make this distinction?

Well, I'm glad you asked.

One of the identity markers of Corinth was having wisdom. Corinth was a city where a person's status was defined by knowledge, which was perceived as wisdom, public oration, wealth and class. The colour of one's skin revealed whether someone worked in the sun or was protected from it. Even the calluses on a person's hand were a giveaway that they were of a different status. Therefore, the Apostle Paul seems to be redefining what is valuable. He is distinguishing between what is valued by society or culture and what is valuable to God.

In doing so, he 'sets the cats among the pigeons', to use a metaphor. He potentially establishes a hostile environment. At the very least, a line of demarcation is placed between civic rulers who do not have God's wisdom and the people of God who have the gift of God's Spirit. There is an emphasis and a distinction between knowledge and knowing – knowledge comes from learning, tradition and experience; wisdom comes from God and is enabled by the Holy Spirit.

One way of reconciling these polarities or plurality of thought is through reflection or re-evaluation. The identities of people in this short chapter who would benefit from such a re-evaluation are:

- Those who are mature (2:6);
- The rulers of this age (2:6, 8);
- Those who have God's Spirit (2:15);
- Those who do not have God's Spirit (2:14);
- Those who have the mind of Christ (2:16).

Yet the Apostle Paul is exercising caution in speaking to the church. His campaign is for change in the church and not necessarily to offend those in authority. Therefore, he uses himself and his identity as an example to measure those who are mature, those who have the Spirit of God and those who have the mind of Christ.

- He is not full of human wisdom, not eloquent, but simply someone who can testify to having encountered the resurrected Christ.
- He is not strong, not courageous and not steady, but he is weak, has great fear and trembling.
- He is not wise or persuasive, but he has demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit.
- He has the mind of Christ.

And so,

One can feel the heavy sadness or deep frustration in the Apostle Paul. He is heartbroken that the church in Corinth could not, or did not, demonstrate the identity, qualities and behaviours that reflected Christ or showed that they had the Spirit of God.

3:1 – They were not spiritual people; instead, they were people of the flesh, motivated by the spirit of their age. They were caught up in the dominant culture of Corinth and, therefore, childlike spiritually.

3:3 – They were emotionally overtaken with jealousy, fearful of losing things they considered precious, and blaming others for their insecurities.

Let's pause here for a brief moment.

Those who have lived, worked or engaged with a jealous person will understand what was happening in the Corinthian church. To clarify, we are not talking about one large congregation but several small gatherings that would meet in people's homes. Therefore, this jealousy might not have been the identity of one person but could have been between churches and multiplied across the congregations in Corinth.

It is not uncommon to think that someone, or an entity – in this case a church – with a jealous tendency might behave irrationally, be over-suspicious of everyone and everything and often unreasonable in their or its behaviour. It is also not uncommon for everyone to adjust their own behaviours, suppress their personalities and even scale back their natural tendencies to avoid provoking the jealous person or entity.

Jealousy is an oasis for quarrels. A quarrel, or an over-exuberant exchange of thoughts, is a sign that we are no longer communicating well. Quarrels manifest themselves in heated arguments, disagreements, bouts of shouting and verbal battles between two or more people. While on some occasions they can have positive outcomes, establishing new parameters and ways of behaving, the converse is also true. They can be the beginning of a breakdown in relationships; in quarrels, people say things that they forever regret.

Yes, the jealousy and quarrelling in Corinth are about the issues [these can be explored if time permits]. But more than that, the critical issue is about the identities we are creating in the process. Jealousy gives us an identity few would be proud of; it harms and destroys relationships.

One antidote to jealousy is having confidence in God and in the Spirit of God to take care of the things we find difficult. We can trust God enough to leave our insecurities in His hands. We can release ourselves from the burden and desperation of trying to make relationships work – and doing it rather badly – by giving them over to God.

And so,

There is an opportunity for the Corinthians to adopt new and different identities.

3:9 – ‘For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.’

Here are three identities for them to take on:

- God’s servants;
- God’s field;
- God’s building,

We can explore all of these, but let’s look at something Christians often don’t see ourselves as – God’s field.

The context here is not a conservation expanse of land left to its own devices so other creatures can flourish and the biodiversity increase – although this is not a bad idea in the 21st century. Rewilding is good for the planet; it allows nature to find its habitat – insects, birds and animals all find a home in the natural world. The soil can recover when it is left to itself. This is no less than what God had in mind when Israel was required to rest the land. When fields were left to rest in antiquity, it was so that they could recover to better serve their owner.

The Apostle Paul is pointing to a fertile, prosperous and productive field. A field that is cultivated and taken care of, and which provides unique crops based on what was sown. Its identity, therefore, is determined by what grows in it.

We might also observe that the Apostle Paul is not speaking about a walled garden. He is talking about a field that is openly displayed, easily visible and accessible to everyone who passes by. Everyone can make their own assessment of the state and the nature of that field. People can judge for themselves whether the land is being prepared for the sowing of seeds; they can see whether the crops are bursting through the ground; they can see whether the field is in full bloom or whether it is harvest time.

These fields might also take on the character of their season. They are there to support the lives and livelihood of all those who labour in them. Those who depend on them for food, raw materials or commodities can look forward to harvest time. And yes, God’s fields flourish; they generate wealth or whatever resources God intended.

And so,

What if we were to borrow the words of the Apostle Paul and suggest that '[we] are God's field'?

Do you believe, like the deist, that God has left us, His fields, to grow untamed, untended, like a rewilding field, so that others might exploit our resources for their own flourishing?

Are we fields that flourish in ways our culture, community, employers and even this church expect of us, but produce little to show we are God's fields?

Are we producing much growth beyond our imaginations, resulting in great admiration, yet very little that demonstrates we belong to Christ?

My sisters and brothers, in God's fields, God makes the decisions on what is planted. In other words, God makes the decisions about you and me.

God's judgements are likely to be very different from those of our culture, national leaders, employers and even those closest and dearest to us.

God's decisions are beyond the limitations imposed by our demographic, ethnicity, gender, accents, where we live and how others look up to or down on us.

The Apostle Paul is provoking us to conceive that any crop that God plants will flourish in his fields; the spiritually mature will flourish; and those who have the Spirit of Christ will flourish.

He is also unequivocal that those who are stirred by jealousy, those who provoke quarrels, and those who embrace the spirit of this age – inequality, injustice, exploitation and the like – are in a different field and will ultimately perish there.

In the Old Testament reading, Moses offers two contrasting options to the people of Israel. We also heard earlier that enslaved Africans were discriminated against even in accessing the Bible.

And so,

I am confident you will not begrudge the opportunity to listen to the passage again. This time, as I read these verses, think of them through the lens of making the choice between God's boundless identity and the identity of the other nations, cultures and gods.

RE-READING DEUTERONOMY 30:15-20

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

May God's name be praised as we, His people, his church, choose life.

Amen

As we prepare our hearts to respond in prayer [and Communion], let us sing:

- I feel Jesus

Pray for

- Those wrestling with feelings of jealousy and anger;
- Those who have been hurt by the unreasonable behaviours of others;
- A more just and equitable world;
- Those struggling with their identity markers, that they will be fortified in their identity in God;
- That God's church would be full of life, and be life-giving and life-affirming.

Sing again:

- I feel Jesus

Invite or offer guidance to those who want to speak to someone or require additional prayers.

CLOSING SONG

- Reign in Me, Sovereign Lord

Alternatively:

- Over All the Earth

THE BLESSING

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Whose identity we have received,
Cause us to flourish, prosper and excel in every good work.
May the Holy Spirit give us confidence to display God's glory
In our families, to our friends, to our colleagues and to all who
encounter us.

Like fields of corn in the midst of famine, may we be
extraordinary sights,
Givers of hope, love and the life of Jesus Christ, our Lord,
Today, and always.

Amen

SCRIPTURE VERSES THAT CAN BE USED

Hosea 12:6

But as for you, return to your God;
hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God.

Romans 12:21

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Proverbs 22:2

The rich and the poor have this in common:
the LORD is the maker of them all.

Acts 10:34-35

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'

Colossians 3:9-11

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

Proverbs 31:8-9

Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.
Speak out, and judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Micah 6:8

And what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Amos 5:24

But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Isaiah 1:17

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

Psalms 82:3

Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.

HYMNS AND WORSHIP SONGS THAT CAN BE USED

- Be Thou My Vision
- Beauty for Brokenness
- Bring Forth the Kingdom
- Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You
- Christ, Be Our Light
- Cry Freedom! In the Name of God, and Let the Cry Resound
- Extol the God of Justice
- From Those Forever Shackled
- God Forgave My Sin
- God of Freedom, God of Justice
- God, Your Justice Towers
- God's Spirit Is in My Heart
- Great God and Lord of the Earth
- How Good it Is, What Pleasure Comes
- How Shall We Sing Salvation's Song
- Jesus Christ Is Waiting, Waiting in the Streets
- Jesus Heard with Deep Compassion
- Lord of All Hopefulness
- Let Us Build a House Where Love Can Dwell
- My Love for You
- They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love
- This Is Amazing Grace
- True Religion
- With the Lord, There Is Mercy and Fulness of Redemption

Speak out for those who cannot
speak, for the rights of all the
destitute. Speak out, and judge
righteously, defend the rights of
the poor and needy.

Proverbs 31:8-9

SECTION 2:

Reflections on the killing of Stephen Lawrence and Racial Justice today

A cross section of those attending churches in Britain and Ireland give their reflections on the murder of Stephen Lawrence and what this means to them and should mean to the church today.

Some reflections take the form of an interview in terms of questions and answers, while others are straightforward meditations.

LAURA NWOGU

Laura is a 21-year-old graduate of International Relations and Development who currently works in marketing and project management for technology companies and organisations. She has worshipped at London Riverside Church since the summer of 2012 and desires to witness the transformation of churches towards a culture of active radical social change, such as anti-racism.

How did you personally respond to the killing?

As a child, I remember watching a documentary about Stephen Lawrence, but it didn't seem so strange to me because by this time I was very well acquainted with the inhumane treatment of Black people and the unwarranted murders and massacres they had experienced. My frustration was mainly at the police who hadn't shown interest in catching those who were responsible for cutting Stephen's life short. I was frustrated at the institutions that failed us all. The education system failed to teach our society why there were different groups of people within London, how they arrived here and why. It failed to create a loving, accepting society, and instead hate and envy were allowed to grow and flourish in place of love and accurate information, and so this fuelled and powered the flames of disdain for Black people in Britain. However, the education system accounts for a part of the problem because after the tragic ordeal, the policing and justice system failed to bring about justice. As a child, I thought, 'The very least they could do is find those who did it,' but that seemed to be the last thing on the minds of those who had a hand in informing the course of justice. It was not accidental; it was callous and intentional, but that didn't surprise me then, and much less now. The same still happens today, I'm sure.

How did your church (the one you attended at the time) respond to this?

At the time, I was a mere thought, but to my knowledge my church didn't respond at all back then. I often wonder what those Sundays would have been like for Black churchgoers at the time following Stephen Lawrence's murder. As a Black person, I know that it would feel isolating, and the lack of conversation about it as a church collectively would have felt like a deafening silence, a real elephant in the room.

What should the church have done?

The church should have adopted an ‘enough is enough’ attitude and implemented change in the way we fellowship and commune with one another. There should have been a desire to actively influence anti-racist movements that would impact the church and the surrounding communities. Racism flourishes in communities where it is accepted, but to not accept it you must, first, before anything, know why it should not be accepted and how it came to be accepted. This requires looking back into history to inform the present and the future – to establish a reason to improve race relations in your local community in order to make sure history no longer repeats itself.

I imagine what it would have been like for a Black teen to go into a shop and be followed by a shopkeeper who automatically assumed they would steal, as a result of Blackness being labelled as synonymous with criminality. I imagine what it would have been like for a member of the church to actually be aware of what was going on and to support that young Black teen, to be aware of the silent insulting exchange they were having with the shopkeeper. That would revolutionise a whole generation’s process of growing up within a community – to be supported, seen and protected. But how is that member of the church meant to support and protect others if they can’t even see the racism happening right there in front of them? There is much to be taught and much to be learnt. Our wider communities in Britain would have benefited greatly from a widespread, successful anti-racist movement that actively worked to educate the leadership and the congregation together and to inform the culture against racism in our towns and cities.

The church should have adopted an ‘enough is enough’ attitude and implemented change in the way we fellowship and commune with one another.

What lessons we can learn from the tragedy?

One lesson we can learn from this tragedy is that the church needs to be a force for change. Looking back at the past often allows us to ‘tut’ and shake our head at those who came before us, but what have we done? What barriers have we broken down? Which Jerichos have we finally made tumble? On the subject of race, it is difficult to say we have. Many may say that we are more integrated, but being in my presence doesn’t automatically mean you love me or your racist views have vanished; it just means you’re in my presence. We, as Christians, believe that we are beings who are deeper than the eyes can see; there are different plains on which you can see life that are not just surface level. Racism runs deep and therefore we need tools that are also deep in order to dig out those roots. Those roots take hold in medical care, policing, families, communities, friendships, commerce, financial services, restaurants, art and so much more, but it all comes from the same place – miseducation. The church should spearhead movements that promote truth and clarity and really amend the racism that runs so deep.

REVD RONALD A. NATHAN

Ron is a senior minister and public theologian, and is the Pastor of the Hoggard African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Jackson, St. Michael, Barbados.

How did you personally respond to the killing at the time?

On 22 April 1993, a young man by the name of Stephen Lawrence was tragically murdered by a group of White, racist youths in southeast London. The tragic event took place while I was in my third year as the Director of the African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance (ACEA). I heard the news of the incident the next day, on my way into work. By the time I had got into the office, there were agitated conversations going on in Whitefield House, Kennington, London.

ACEA had begun to rebrand itself into the UK's largest Black Christian Development Agency. It was therefore pushing the envelope forward in articulating a much more progressive agenda for engaging with socio-economic and political issues, including racism. The very existence of ACEA was a recognition of racism within the Christian fraternity and the Body of Christ. The Community Initiatives Unit, a partnership between ACEA and the Evangelical Alliance, was a practical commitment to redress inequalities within society through faith-based projects. ACEA submitted a written presentation to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry that summarised our outlook on the matter of race relations in the United Kingdom. This presentation was authored by Dr R. David Muir, a member of the ACEA Executive, on behalf of ACEA.

How did your church (the one you attended at the time) respond to this?

At the time of Stephen's murder my local church was a multicultural church in Orpington, Kent. It really was silent about the murder, not wanting to prejudge the verdict. There were no sermons, Bible studies or literature provided to better educate the church on racism or on how to address racist behaviour in society. This was typical of evangelical responses to the cries of racism and the experience of racists attacks. There was a level of embarrassment and defensiveness. Of course, the calls for prayer and forgiveness were not too far behind. There were also the softly spoken words that always blamed the victims of racism.

What do you think the church should have done?

There were too few Christians willing to take to the streets on behalf of racial justice. The establishment of a racial justice fund to begin to support investigations into racial abuse should have been a start. The Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice, Churches Commission for Racial Justice and MELRAW were all marginalised in their attempts to move forward the discussion and gain any practical traction. Many times, I could count on one hand the number of Christians who would take part in anti-racism marches and demonstrations.

Contrast that with March for Jesus – between 80,000 and 100,000 one month before Stephen’s murder. My question then, as now, is what would Jesus be marching for? From Stephen Lawrence to George Floyd, there is still too much silence on issues of racism.

What are the lessons we can learn from that tragedy?

Black Churches need to take a lead in matters related to racial justice. We cannot afford the luxury of waiting on White guilt before we respond to this cancer of White supremacy. We need to be diligent to defend advances in law and at a grass-roots level. We must continue to build capacity to fight racism at all levels and in all fields of society.

Since Stephen’s death, the United Kingdom has had time to forget. The inquiry was monumental, but monuments can be forgotten and ignored, and they fall into disrepair.

The uncomfortableness that came with the exposure of the underbelly of racism in British society and the identification of the institutional entrenchment of racism in the British culture provided us with an opportunity to make some deep-seated changes to the multicultural society.

We squandered the gains in law and public awareness and lost the opportunity to bring about next generational change in a post-colonial world. We believed that to tinker with racial laws is in and of itself enough to bring change in the wider society in respect to race.

What has been learnt is that justice in respect to racial attacks takes an extremely long time.

We cannot afford the luxury of waiting on White guilt before we respond to this cancer of White supremacy.

DR ELEASAH PHOENIX LOUIS

Eleasah is a researcher and resource developer exploring racial justice.

How has the killing of Stephen Lawrence impacted your racial justice journey?

When Stephen Lawrence died in 1993, I was just starting primary school, but I remember it always being a fixture in my montage of ‘how the world works’, which included never going to Eltham, ‘unless you looking fi dead’ (to die). I learned these things by listening to older people’s conversations, kids talking about it in the playground and seeing reports on the news. The murder of Stephen Lawrence has undeniably been a foundation block in my identity formation as a Black–British Jamaican/Northern Irish child from Brixton, but in ways that have been hard to articulate as a child witness to the impact on my community.

Moving on to my current practice as a researcher and resource developer for various racial justice efforts in Britain, Stephen’s murder has been symbolic for me in that it has been the bridge between two generations – at the time, I was not scared for my own safety but for that of my uncle, the youngest and coolest of my dad’s brothers. Despite feeling at a distance from the danger of being knifed by White racists while waiting for the bus in the ways that I imagined Stephen’s peers had been, I was very aware that the work his parents have done at the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation, the inquiry that led to the Macpherson Report and the activism in the local Black community toward the memorial for Stephen would be shaping the lives of the people in my generation. To have formally identified institutional racism as a reality within the British police force has meant that people in my generation, in new British and global landscapes, have legal and social precedents that would serve us and equip us to seek justice in this new century.

What lessons have you learnt from that tragedy?

There are several things I reflect on as lessons for strategy from the tragedy and the response from those seeking justice.

First, we must investigate injustices; formal inquiries must be enacted and reports must document the investigation and the outcome. This process allows society to look back and reflect – to learn from past mistakes, re-evaluate our thinking and gauge the scope of the issue. Had those suspected and interrogated been quietly processed, without the inquiry into the way the police had managed the investigation process, then ‘institutional racism’ may not be the precedent those engaging in social matters can stand on. The police and the nation would not have had the opportunity to face its evil.

The second point is about identifying, defining and naming the issue. The stories of individual lives are part of society's larger story and shape. They are a microcosm and tell us something about the world these people live in and what drives them, scares them, corrupts them, and what types of contexts lead to these despicable and tragic events. The persistence of the Lawrences, their supporters, leaders and activists have not allowed the murder of Stephen Lawrence to be dismissed as gang rivalry, bullying or a random attack, but to be identified as racially motivated. Sensitivity to the social climate of the time, the geography and recent related crimes in the area – in sum, the context in which Stephen Lawrence's murder was situated – allowed for discernment that again exposes the ills in our society.

The pursuit of equality and justice for those marginalised because of their ethnic difference should always be rooted in the Word and love of God.

The last point is that we should not grow weary; things take time. Hearts take time to soften, and laws, procedures and policies take time to be amended and reformed. Faithfulness to the cause of justice is required – the long game. Never let up – things take time. The legacy of the pursuit for justice for Stephen Lawrence by his parents and community, although taxing, expensive and not without its internal casualties, has proved that justice is achievable if we remain committed to the cause.

Was Stephen's killing Britain and Ireland's 'George Floyd moment'?

The murders of Stephen Lawrence and George Floyd brought multiple societies to a standstill. They were both opportunities for society to question itself and re-evaluate the nature of its systems, institutions and attitudes towards people of colour. They presented us with chances to interrogate policing, the relationship between the police and the Black community, the progress being made to challenge racist attitudes that can determine the services provided by law enforcement and to reconsider how we identify racism in an ever-changing and rapidly evolving society.

Unfortunately, society is afforded these opportunities for reform and repentance through the death of our family members. Still, it is undeniably one of the critical links between these two tragic deaths.

What does (or should) racial justice look like in our churches?

The pursuit of equality and justice for those marginalised because of their ethnic difference should always be rooted in the Word and love of God. We were all made in the image of God, and Christ – Yeshua, our Messiah – died for all of us.

The church, the bride of Christ, the children of God should reflect this equality and pursue equality and humility by openly denouncing racism as sin. They must actively engage with processes in society that seek change and shine the light of Christ on its darkness and deficit. True love is not found in the systems and theories of the world but in the revelation of Christ – His ministry, life, death, resurrection and return.

In practical terms, the church should be present and vocal about the sins that corrupt our society and its systems. We must move among our people and minister to our community as Christ did. Churches should also look internally at their own cultures and systems (ways of doing church, interpreting Scripture and discipling converts) and develop strategies for tackling the sin that causes us to hate, reject and alienate our brothers and sisters. Yeshua taught, challenged and rebuked his disciples so that they would be the apostles and leaders of his church. The change starts with us.

Churches must acknowledge the sin of racism that has corrupted our sacred spaces.

Churches must turn their hearts to *all* oppressed, marginalised and discriminated peoples.

Churches must repent, engage in restitution (reparation) and be reconciled with their brothers and sisters.

Racism does not just go away in time. . . it must be acknowledged and uprooted.



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“We were all made in the image of God, and Christ – Yeshua, our Messiah – died for all of us.”

LINBERT SPENCER OBE

Linbert is a writer and consultant on racial justice matters in church and society.

How did you respond to Stephen Lawrence's killing?

My response to the killing of Stephen Lawrence was one of horror, then rage, which slowly turned to frustration, and then over time to outrage as the police investigation into his murder stalled and faltered.

How did your church respond to the murder?

I can't really remember how my church – The Salvation Army – responded, either locally in Bedford or nationally. Whatever we actually did at the time, I think we should have sought to engage our congregation in a dialogue in order to help increase our shared understanding of the day-to-day issues of discrimination, stereotyping and negative bias faced by minority ethnic groups. In a somewhat tragic way, I see this as an opportunity lost; one of many over the years.

What lessons can the church learn from this tragedy?

As a Christian church, I think one lesson we can learn is that we need to be more prepared to respond to the everyday tragedies and difficulties, large and small, faced by individuals and groups in our communities. We need to respond, with the same degree of urgency and level of energy and intentionality, as we do when we mobilise to respond to 'disasters' occurring elsewhere in the world. As Chair of All We Can, an international development and relief organisation founded by Methodists, I am aware that passion and speed is frequently evident in response to issues 'over there'.

When it comes to creating harmonious communities where we are called to be, churches need to be leading the way and should always be engaged in challenging exclusion and combatting racism. Moreover, this must go way beyond the statements of commitment from national church leaders, important and relevant though these are.

In the church world that I inhabit, I confess to being frequently disappointed that I see very little evidence of church leadership actively holding to account those who have responsibility for turning the statements of commitment into action. It's one thing to talk about accountability; it's another thing entirely to consistently hold people to account for their actions, or, more often than not, their inaction.

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At national and local levels, churches should be calling out discrimination, bias, micro-aggressions, prejudice and stereotyping as and when we become aware of them. Clearly this is not simply about the church leaders; there are too many instances where church members behave in ways that are discriminatory and display bias and prejudice such that others leave, or are not minded to join.

I believe that if we, as the Christian church, are indeed part of creating the Kingdom in the here and now, then we must all become more focused on creating and maintaining inclusive communities in which everyone feels respected, valued, safe and trusted and has a sense of belonging. Perhaps the question for all of us at this time is, how can the church be a source of solace and strength for everyone in the communities in which we have our life and being, and enable our communities to remain certain that the church is committed to their well-being, and that any negative treatment they or others may experience will be confronted?



The Guardian, 24 January 2020: "Church of England urged to apologise for Windrush racism: The Church of England should apologise for its "horrible and humiliating racism" towards people of the Windrush generation, many of whom were turned away from parish churches, and it should consider commissioning an independent report on institutional racism, a member of its clergy has said."

REVD SIVAKUMAR RAJAGOPALAN

Kumar is Baptist minister who has a passion for racial justice. He was formerly a Regional Minister for Racial Justice with the London Baptists from 2003 to 2018.

In 2018, a documentary was aired, entitled, *Stephen: The Murder that Changed a Nation*. The critical question is, to what extent has the UK changed for the better with respect to racist prejudice and discrimination in all walks of life?

Back in 1993, my wife and I moved to a town and county outside London, which had a small number of ethnic minorities and a reputation of being unwelcoming towards outsiders. The boy next door mimicked an Indian accent, our car was vandalised, and I often felt conspicuous, particularly on my commute to and from London. My worst experience was being aggressively chased by plainclothes police officers in an unmarked vehicle for allegedly making an 'unusual' three-point turn!

When I moved to multi-ethnic South Norwood to study for Baptist ministry, I discovered that racism was alive and well within our churches and Christian institutions. At my college interview I was informed that churches would bin my CV because of my ethnicity, and I was asked by a member of staff when I would be returning to my own country to begin ministry! I always rue the fact that I didn't retort, 'Do you mean Wembley?'

The definition of institutional racism is and will continue to be a very useful yardstick to evaluate other institutions, including the church.

In the years following Stephen Lawrence's murder and entering the 21st century, overt racism receded slightly, to be replaced by Islamophobia in the wake of 9/11, but it never disappeared. While the racially motivated murder of 18-year-old Anthony Walker in 2005 in Liverpool stands out, there have been countless others. In 2012 the Institute of Race Relations said that almost 100 racially motivated murders had taken place since the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

The 2016 Brexit vote saw a 16% rise in hate crime, and 2019 figures from the Home Office revealed that hate crimes in England and Wales had doubled in five years, with the majority being racially motivated.

Before and since Stephen Lawrence's murder, I and countless other Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities have been very aware that Britain is a racist society, in which we encounter a wide range of racist incidents, from my minor experiences at one end of the spectrum to the hateful racist murder of Stephen Lawrence and many others at the other.

Personal experience and the experience of others since the murder of Mr Lawrence reveals that Britain's response to race matters has been mixed. While within wider society, the media and politics, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people are certainly far more visible, it doesn't wholly indicate a reduction in racism and a more-just society. Some are successful despite racism, others through accommodation to and acquiescence with the system, and still others unhelpfully and erroneously claim that their success reveals that racism is either minimal or non-existent. And the Covid-19 pandemic revealed that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities are disadvantaged on a range of issues, and still face unfair treatment within the criminal justice system.

For me, over the past 30 years a very significant source of learning is Doreen and Neville Lawrence's tenacious fight for justice. Through their efforts the Macpherson Report rightly concluded the Metropolitan Police force to be institutionally racist. The definition of institutional racism is and will continue to be a very useful yardstick to evaluate other institutions, including the church. In the wake of the inquiry, the repeal of double jeopardy legislation enabled the conviction of two of Stephen's murderers, and ensures that others have the prospect of seeing justice done even if the perpetrators are not initially convicted.

While the murder of Mr Lawrence primarily affected the UK, the global airing of George Floyd's murder has impacted the whole world and conscientised hundreds of millions to the reality of racism and racial violence. The most salutary point that requires permanent attention is the institutionalised nature of racism and racialised violence, which led to the Metropolitan Police's failure to properly investigate Mr Lawrence's murder and a US police officer murdering Mr Floyd.

Going forward, both within church and society, there is a need to educate and inspire the next generation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and White youth and young adult racial justice advocates. The experience of the Lawrences and others must be passed on, particularly with respect to how to navigate the system so that they can avoid known pitfalls and pursue matters more quickly. The church must be at the vanguard of pursuing racial justice as we serve the Lord who loves justice (Isaiah 61:8).

DIONNE GRAVESANDE

Dionne is currently the Principal Adviser for Ecumenical Relations and Theology at Christian Aid and a prime mover within the National Church Leaders Forum.

The name Stephen Lawrence causes four words or phrases to sprint to the front of my mind: rage, racial trauma, resilience and reconciliation. It is a continual reflection I revisit as a framework to unpack and deconstruct themes and issues of institutional racism which, at their worst, become tools to destroy and deny life. Stephen's name will, I think, be forever associated with the power structures and a government that presided over procedures and processes which produced laws that perpetually disadvantaged racialised minorities. Such evil must be resisted and called out. A culture that by design favours one 'racial' group as the dominant people group cannot be right. So, for me, my rage about Stephen's untimely death needed to be transformed into a righteous anger to serve as a launchpad for prayer and action.

In 2020, the rage returned following the tragic murder of George Floyd in police custody. The world witnessed another racial trauma. It was a cold, hard truth to which a new generation of freedom fighters dismantling systemic racism said, 'No, not in our name,' as public citizens who make up the 'we', 'us' and 'ours'. The tools of social media hashtags, organised protests and silent resistance became the weapons of their warfare. Across the world, women and men of colour became visible as they demonstrated a radicalised, affirming self-love in the war for survival and their children's future.

The work of 'calling out' and calling for justice is a continual task for the churches who witness racial injustice and experience a deep longing for love, justice, reconciliation and peace. Such injustice exposes our flawed humanity that abuses power, exploits the vulnerable and disregards victims. At the heart of the gospel that unites Christians of all nations, races and languages is God's demonstrated affirmation of justice and reconciliation. By the fact that his death occurred at the behest of cruel and unjust authorities, Christ is able today to identify with every victim of systemic injustice in our world. We are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, stopping the corruption of our time and overcoming the darkness that threatens to engulf us. This gospel of hope and peace has been entrusted to the church, the people of God. It is to be embodied in our lifestyles, demonstrated by our actions and explained by our speaking out.

By the fact that his death occurred at the behest of cruel and unjust authorities, Christ is able today to identify with every victim of systemic injustice in our world.

Christ calls his church today to be faithful stewards who advance these values by our presence, courageous and caring deeds, and prophetic and pastoral words. Ethnic diversity is the gift and plan of God in creation, and so we are called to stand in solidarity with those who suffer racial discrimination and violence. For the sake of the gospel, we lament and call for repentance where Christians have participated in ethnic violence, injustice or oppression. We also call for repentance for the many times Christians have been complicit in such evils by silence, apathy or presumed neutrality, or by providing defective theological justification for these. Through our earnest prayers and with dependence on the Holy Spirit, churches must stand alongside sisters and brothers to shine a beacon of truth, hope and peace.

This is my continued prayer, and I will travail towards the day when the church will be the world's most visibly shining model of ethnic reconciliation and its most active advocate for conflict resolution.



Stephen Lawrence

REVD PAUL ROCHESTER

Paul is General Secretary of the Free Churches Group.

The murder of Stephen Lawrence has contributed to improvements in the experience of Black people in the criminal justice system and the inequalities they face in modern-day Britain. However, there is still a long journey ahead, to get to the place of a fairer society where people do not receive preferential treatment based on the colour of their skin or their ethnic group. Stephen Lawrence's parents, Neville Lawrence and Baroness Doreen Lawrence, had to fight a long and hard battle to get justice for the murder of their son, and things should be better now. But are they?

Twenty years have passed since the public inquiry into Stephen's murder and the publication of the Macpherson Report. The Home Affairs Committee (HAC) held a Liaison Committee debate in July 2022, raising concerns about the Government's slow response to its reportⁱ on progress towards implementing Macpherson's seventy recommendations. The debate also addressed the Government's failure to act on specific issues that the HAC's report raised. While the report was a helpful intervention, it's unfortunate that it was triggered by Baroness Lawrence's concerns about the slow progress in implementing many of Macpherson's recommendations.

Macpherson's report aimed to tackle racist prejudice and unfairness in policing and wider parts of society. While there are no easy solutions to tackling racial injustice, the first step is to acknowledge that racism is a stain on our humanity. It should never have been tolerated in any form and certainly should be rejected now, whatever the cost in doing so. Actions to address systemic racism are unlikely to lead to meaningful change at once, but could improve the situation for future generations to enjoy a more just and cohesive society.

When someone has faced racial injustice, those not directly affected by racism should resist the urge to quickly acknowledge the wrong and move on. Insensitivity coupled with an inability to empathise with victims of racial injustice only compound the problem. Where a Black person faces injustice at the hands of the criminal justice system, life chances can be severely reduced. The trauma felt and ruined hopes can lead to chronic mental health problems. Those involved with victims of racial injustice will understand the devastation in terms of broken families and blighted education and employment opportunities.

Where wrongs are committed, the Bible teaches the need for restitution, where possible. Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus is a case in point.

ⁱ Third Report of the Home Affairs Committee, Session 2021-22, The Macpherson Report: twenty-two years on, HC 139, and the Government Response, HC 274.

From a Christian perspective, empowerment of the Holy Spirit and godly wisdom is needed to effectively tackle the evil of racism and to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in all parts of society. There needs to be a willingness to dig deep within the human heart and face what could be uncomfortable truths.

Where a Black person is regarded as inferior, they can be seen as undeserving of respect, dignity and basic human kindness. Even if a Black person is of excellent character and making a positive contribution to society, this can be true. It's time to be honest about the fact that racism goes to heart of who a person is. Scripture teaches that an evil heart can only be fully cleansed by the power of the gospel. This may sound trite, but it's the crux of the matter.

Scripture also teaches that every person is created equal in the image of God. This should have a bearing on how people treat each other. Faith in God and the experience of sharing Jesus' life teach that loving God and one's neighbour are essential to life. Where wrongs are committed, the Bible teaches the need for restitution, where possible. Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus is a case in point. Discussion about what this means for institutions is a live issue. Hopefully, institutions who have the opportunity and resources to remedy injustices will consider what this means for them.

Paul Wilson, a retired Metropolitan Police officer, writes in his book *Rocking the Boat*, 'why I was such an outspoken critic of the Metropolitan Police's numerous attempts to portray itself as an organisation on top of its racism problems'.ⁱⁱ This statement highlights the danger of wanting to be seen as tackling racism and racist cultures in an organisation, but not focusing on what matters.

The mainstream media recently reported on a WhatsApp group of racist retired police officers. It begs the question as to how these retired police officers used their authority over 20 to 30 years of policing. A radical approach may be to review convictions in which these officers were involved. It's time for radical thinking and policies which lead to meaningful change.

There's more to do in tackling racial injustice to create a fairer criminal justice process that delivers justice for all. Two questions to consider: Does the Government have the political will to do what's needed, and what more can the church do?

ii Paul Wilson, *Rocking the Boat: A Superintendent's 30 Year Career Fighting Institutional Racism*, SRL Publishing, London, 2021.

CANON ALED EDWARDS, OBE

Aled is Chief Executive of Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales and Secretary of the Interfaith Council for Wales.

In April 1993, I was a community pastor on the Llyn Peninsula in Gwynedd, Wales. Eltham was a long way away, and a deeply rural Welsh community may not have fully understood all that was conveyed by the murder of a young, Black teenager in a distant city. It would take time to understand more fully the nature of the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence. The significance of the murder would instil in me a desire to seek racial justice. That involvement would lead in 2006 to my appointment as a commissioner at the Commission for Racial Equality.

Our church in Botwnnog enjoyed a warm and loving evangelical tradition. Hundreds flocked to its acts of worship every summer from every part of the UK and beyond. We remembered, prayed and grieved for those who had suffered loss. We also prayed for a just world.

In response to that terrible act, churches should have spoken out with greater clarity. To conversations in churches that began at the time with, 'I'm not a racist but. . .', the response should have been, 'Quit while you are ahead, before the but.' The real lesson to be learnt was that racism can be deeply institutional and must be challenged at that institutional level.



Photo by Kim Aldis: Creative Commons 3.0 licence; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1981_Brixton_riot

A world away: 11 April 1981, Police with riot shields line up outside the Atlantic Pub, on the corner of Atlantic Road and Coldharbour Lane, Brixton.

KAREN CAMPBELL

Karen is Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries (Mission) at the United Reformed Church.

I was a young woman when Stephen Lawrence was murdered. Police mistreatment of Black people – and young Black men in particular – seemed almost a ‘norm’ back then. My brothers would laugh about who had played ‘big shot’ and received a blow to the jaw in a police van! It’s not that it was OK – it just was the way it was, and at that time racism in the UK was more overt than it is today.

Against this backdrop, news of Stephen Lawrence’s murder was shocking – but the outrage wasn’t as great as it should have been. The systemic racism demonstrated by the ensuing police response captured the public imagination only because of the determination of Stephen’s parents to get justice for their son. Still, the outcry should have been more. Stephen’s murder, and the police response, should have been the UK’s ‘George Floyd moment’; I’m not sure if it was.

The world moved on – but Stephen was not forgotten.

Still, the outcry should have been more. Stephen’s murder, and the police response, should have been the UK’s ‘George Floyd moment’; I’m not sure if it was.

In 2020, George Floyd was murdered by police in the United States. He was not the first Black person to meet this fate, and he would not be the last, but his death was noticed because the world was standing still. People who might otherwise barely have paused before getting on with getting on quite simply had nowhere to go, nowhere else to look. George Floyd’s murder hit the world head on, magnified by COVID-19, made inescapable by lockdown. And people demanded to know WHY?

Critically, people asked, ‘How could this have happened AGAIN?’

In that standstill moment, the world recalled so much of what had gone before – those who had been abused before, those who had lost their lives before, the injustices endured before. George Floyd’s death took on heightened meaning because of all that had happened in the past: this was not new. Not remote. Not confined to ‘over there’. The world opened its eyes. The world remembered. Each context has its own memories – and here in the UK, George Floyd’s murder was rendered even more outrageous in light of the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Stephen Lawrence *was* our George Floyd moment – or should have been. We just didn’t realise it.

Whether or not we fully embraced the impact of his death, Stephen Lawrence was never forgotten. His murder sparked something in many, many people. Exposure of the police's shameful response sparked something in many people. *The way things were* could not be accepted as the way they would continue to be.

There was growing awareness of the phenomenon of 'institutional racism' – a calling-out of what Black communities had experienced and sensed for years, even before they had the language to name it. There was an emerging challenge to look at what Black people were experiencing rather than assuming the need to look at what they were up to. There was a stirring – both demanding justice and committed to working for justice. I didn't know until fairly recently that Racial Justice Sunday was born from Stephen's killing – but I have known about the existence of Racial Justice Sunday for a long time. In church and society, Stephen's killing left a lasting impact.

Focus on racial justice has re-emerged in light of George Floyd's murder. In Britain and Ireland, work sparked by everything to do with Stephen Lawrence's death has been re-energised. Ecumenical racial justice work has been rekindled and has taken on renewed urgency. Racial justice needs this focus – both in society and in the church. Racism is a beast that will keep rearing its head if we fool ourselves that it has been dealt with. Black people, White people; young people, older people; Christians and society at large – we need to keep our eyes open; we need to keep racial justice on the agenda; and we need to live the hope that the way things are is not the way things have to be.

JENNIFER LAURENT-SMART

Jennifer is the Equality and Diversity Manager for The Salvation Army, United Kingdom and Ireland Territory.

April 1993 holds both bitter and sweet memories for me. On 14 April, I gave birth to my first child, a beautiful girl, and experienced the joy of being a mother for the first time, entrusted with a precious life.

Eight days later, while holding my child, I listened to the news of another mother's child, brutally murdered: Stephen Lawrence; his life snatched away in a most violent way.

I felt a range of emotions: shock, anger, disbelief and immense sadness at the loss of a young and beautiful life. I thought of Stephen's mother, his father and his family and felt their pain. And I felt the pain of our community. Why?

In the decades that have passed since Stephen's murder, so many questions remain unanswered. Why was justice so elusive? Why were so many mistakes made in the investigation? And when institutional racism was eventually called out, why was so little done to address it? We witnessed the establishment of commissions and investigations and scrutinised the subsequent reports that

were produced, each confirming what we already knew to be true. While some lessons were learned, they appeared to have been temporary, and during this last year alone we have witnessed, as we have on almost on an annual basis, numerous incidents relating to racism, the abuse of power and bias by those tasked to protect and serve our communities.

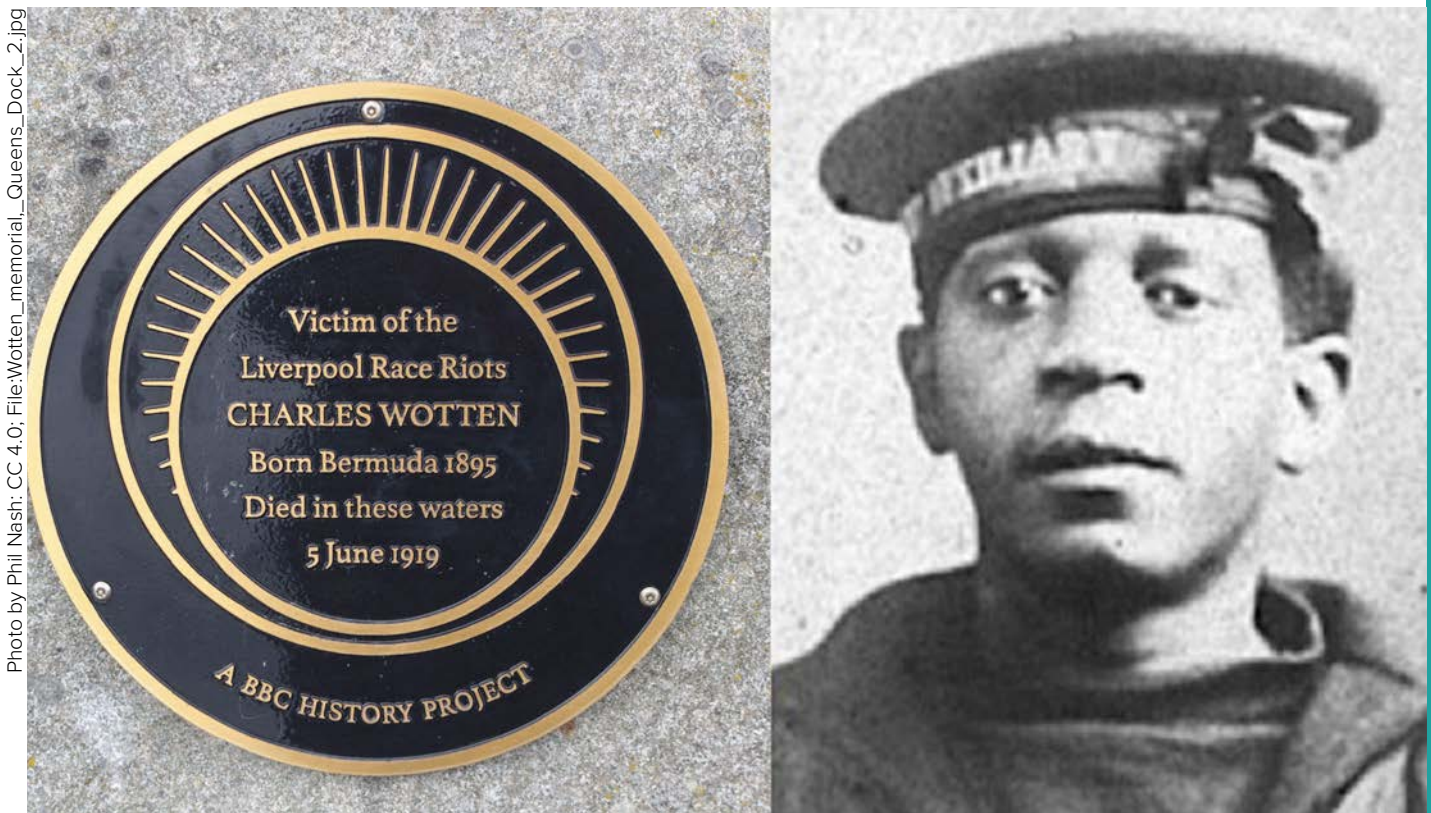
The Lawrence family, in their relentless fight for justice, act as a reminder to us all; that you do not give up, even when the odds are stacked against you; you keep pushing for justice because justice is worth pursuing. The establishment of Racial Justice Sunday in 1995 was the beginning of a framework that would focus the church as a community of people and enable it to play a key role in building the foundation where God's justice is a reality for all people.

Through Racial Justice Sunday and beyond, the church can and should lead the Christian response and outworking of biblical value and truths: that we all have intrinsic value and are deserving of justice. The church has a role to play in helping to find solutions and acting as a bridge between sometimes opposing views, placing itself in the centre of transformation, speaking into, calling out, standing with and challenging.

Through Racial Justice Sunday and beyond, the church can and should lead the Christian response and outworking of biblical value and truths: that we all have intrinsic value and are deserving of justice.

The church must also consider the role it plays in rooting out racial injustice within its own systems and structures, and where racial injustice is found to exist, it is essential that the church takes steps to actively challenge and remove that injustice. The empowerment of communities is an essential element of the Christian response.

As a Black woman, racial justice is personal to me. When racial justice fails, the scars of injustice are carried by people who look like me, by people of colour – men, women and children. When Stephen Lawrence was murdered, we never imagined that almost 30 years later there would be similar calls for justice for other young Black people whose lives have been viciously stolen or who have been broken by the very structures that should protect them. The murder of George Floyd, the global response and call to action for racial justice serve to remind us of the power of our collective voices, and the need to take a leaf out of the Lawrence family book and fight on.



Forgotten history: 27 year old Charles Wotten was murdered in the Queen's Dock in Liverpool on June 5, 1919. Despite several police officers being present at the time, no arrests were made.

YOGI SUTTON

Yogi is Chair of the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ).

Stephen's death chilled me as I followed the news reports. My own daughter was the same age as Stephen, born only a few months after him, and was also preparing for A levels. I watched her getting ready to go out with friends, so young – they were still children, really – with so much of life ahead, so much potential. Where does the hatred come from that drives a person to take a precious life for no reason other than the colour of his skin? Why was the death of this young Black man not investigated properly? Horror turned to outrage. The injustice of it burned like a lump in my throat.

And justice for Stephen would take many, many years. The campaign faced resistance from those unwilling to recognise the racism in our society and in our public institutions, particularly within the police. Ordered by Jack Straw, Home Secretary at the time, the Macpherson Report on the inquiry into Stephen Lawrence's murder was published in 1999. It found the investigation by the

Metropolitan Police to have been 'marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers'. At the time it sent seismic waves through society. It was a turning point and a recognition that deep-rooted racism could not be tolerated.

Stephen's legacy is profound and his death helped expose the racist undercurrent infecting our society. But the price was too high to pay. A young life, full of potential, was stolen. We must never forget.

In April 1999, the Catholic Bishops Conference welcomed the Macpherson Report and urged 'all Catholic organisations and institutions to look again at how they could better serve

minority ethnic communities in our midst'. The bishops published *Guidelines* for the Review, which lasted for two years, and some 60 organisations participated. This was a very good response from the bishops, and it may have led to real change in a number of organisations. However, it took 18 years for some of the killers of Stephen Lawrence to be brought to justice. In January 2012, Gary Dobson and David Norris were sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder.

It took as many years to gain justice for Stephen as he had lived. Take a moment to let that sink in. As a parent, and now a grandparent, I cannot imagine the pain Stephen's family and friends have endured, or begin to quantify what they have lost. But what did we all lose that night in 1993? What might that bright young man have achieved? I think of my own daughter and those who grew up with her. I'm grateful for all they have achieved and the positive contributions they have made to their families and communities. Each one of them is a blessing, precious.

Stephen's legacy is profound and his death helped expose the racist undercurrent infecting our society. But the price was too high to pay. A young life, full of potential, was stolen. We must never forget.

And what about the church? Thirty years later, we look at the church and have to ask, 'Where are we now?' Many of our parishes include people from diverse backgrounds, but too often they do not have a voice or a seat at the table where decisions are made. Is it time for another review?

REVD DR SAHR JOHN YAMBASU

Sahr is a Methodist minister, serving in Ireland for the last 27 years. Originally from Sierra Leone, he is the author of two books and several articles. He is the ex-President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and co-founder of the Africa Centre in Ireland.

When Stephen Lawrence was murdered, I was still living and working in my home country, Sierra Leone. The nature of communication in those days was such that the incident was not as widely known in Sierra Leone as was, for example, George Floyd's recent murder in the United States of America.

Murder, for any reason, is a serious crime against humanity, and must engender moral outrage. Instigated by racial prejudice, it drives fear into those who look different and are in the minority in any society. And to discover that those charged with the public responsibility to enforce the law and keep people safe collude with such murderers by covering up evidence to protect them from punishment is doubly fearful. If there was ever a single reason for the church to pursue racial justice, this, for me, is that reason.

Reflecting on Stephen Lawrence's murder brings to mind the saying that 'power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. At play in the case is what I prefer to call 'White power' (to make others feel less human), money power (to bribe law enforcement officers), drug power (to generate money) and the power of evil (to drive people's actions). In each of these instances of the manifestation of power in the case of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, we see the corrupt and corrosive nature of power. In 1999, Nicolas Kent designed a documentary play based on the trial of the suspects in the Lawrence case, called, *The Colour of Justice*. Might a sequel, *The Price of Justice*, be necessary? In our world today, the church must be alive to the fact that justice is both coloured and expensive; and the church must be ready and willing to, so to speak, to pay the price for the colour of the justice it favours and demands both within and outside it. That would include all the time, material, spiritual and human resources at its disposal. It is simply not enough to just talk about it. We must work hard to see it done in the church and society.

But to note only the evil misuse of power in this case is not to tell the whole story. For, in the use of the corrupt and corrosive powers noted above, there is also clear evidence of the use of power to protect, respect and enhance life regardless of the colour of the person who lives it. I have in mind here the efforts of so many to see that justice was done for Stephen: Stephen's father and mother, anti-racist protesters, politicians, legislators, newspapers, judges and police officers who did all they could to make sure justice was done in this case. Their outrage at what happened to Stephen matched their actions to right the wrong. These people remind us of the unfailing evidence of human decency even in the worst of life's experiences. These are the bearers of the light of Christ in the darkness of this world. They represent for us hope in seemingly hopeless situations.

Instigated by racial prejudice, it drives fear into those who look different and are in the minority in any society. And to discover that those charged with the public responsibility to enforce the law and keep people safe collude with such murderers by covering up evidence to protect them from punishment is doubly fearful.

I recall someone say during the trial of George Floyd’s murderer in the United States of America that ‘justice is not just about convicting someone who has done wrong. It is also a process of transformation that prevents that wrong from happening again.’ There is no doubt in my mind that Stephen Lawrence’s murder is a ‘George Floyd moment’ in Britain. There is equally no doubt in my mind that what in the end will matter most is the process of transformation that would lead to preventing such a wrong being done in Britain again.

It is fitting that I conclude this short reflection with the words of Stephen Lawrence’s mother, Doreen, who said, ‘I would like Stephen to be remembered as a young man who had a future. He was well loved, and had he been given the chance to survive maybe he would have been the one to bridge the gap between Black and White because he didn’t distinguish between Black or White. He saw people as people.’ⁱⁱⁱ In a post-Brexit Britain with right-wing politics allegedly in ascendancy, we pray and hope for many ‘Stephen Lawrences’ in the land, and that they would be respected, supported, encouraged and, most importantly, protected from the likes of those who murdered Stephen. The church must be seen to play a leading role in this direction, starting with addressing disparities within it in how it treats people of different skin colours. ‘People first, under God, regardless of the colour of their skin’, must inform every attitude, decision and action of the church of Christ.

iii BBC News, 12 January 2012.



CC BY-SA 2.0; commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Notting_Hill_Carnival_2001

Looking on: Australian TV crew at the 2001 Notting Hill Carnival

REVD DR ISRAEL OLUWOLE OLOFINJANA

Israel is Director of One People Commission at the Evangelical Alliance.

The scheme to send refugees who are people of colour to Rwanda has met with a serious backlash and, at the time of writing, there is an appeal against the scheme. But this is not an isolated incident because there is also the Nationality and Borders Act, and a leaked report that suggests that the British immigration system is racially motivated to control the migration of people of colour. All of these are at the back of the Windrush scandal which saw many African and Caribbean people threatened with deportation (or, in some instances, actually deported), detained, or had their legal rights and status as British citizens questioned.

These incidents therefore raise an uncomfortable question around institutional racism. The death of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 was a watershed moment in British law and policing as the inquiry and the subsequent report was perhaps the first to help us define and articulate institutional racism within the British context as, 'The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin.'^{iv}

The year 2023 marks 30 years since the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Therefore, the question is, have we made progress in Britain in addressing institutional or systemic racism? The Windrush scandal, the Rwanda scheme, the story of 'Child Q' and others emerging around strip-searching/stop and search suggest that we are not post-racial. How, then, are we to understand the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) Report, which states that we should be careful about how we use the words 'institutional racism' because there are other factors at play?

I am one of the few people who actually believe that the CRED Report (also known as the Sewell Report) offers some good recommendations and wider parameters that we need to consider, such as taking a holistic approach to tackling discrimination and disadvantage. Nevertheless, the report argued, 'Put simply we no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities.'^v However, in the words of Doreen Lawrence, the report 'has pushed [the fight against racism] back 20 years or more.'^{vi}

As a country, how can we move forward this difficult and divisive conversation, and, more importantly, what is the prophetic role of the church when it comes

This is a big task, but perhaps each local church could start with a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation group, possibly as a house group that would initially discuss these matters, and then see how such conversations might challenge and shape our church structures and leadership.

iv Macpherson Report, 1999.

v CRED Report, 2021.

vi *The Guardian*, 1 April 2021: www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/01/doreen-lawrence-says-no-10-report-gives-racists-the-green-light.

to racial justice concerns? I believe that at the heart of the gospel is a message of reconciliation, and the church has a mandate to help reconcile different and polarised communities. But the church also has a message of truth and justice. The Bible says, 'You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (John 8:32). The Bible also instructs us to 'act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8, NIVUK).

Could the church champion racial justice concerns that addresses the root cause of institutional or systemic racism through a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation strategy? This would mean the church speaking truth to power unashamedly, and confronting racial injustice in church and society. A big part of such strategy would be to speak the truth about the root causes of institutional racism, such as enslavement of Africans and colonisation by European countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and other parts of our world. This is a big task, but perhaps each local church could start with a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation group, possibly as a house group that would initially discuss these matters, and then see how such conversations might challenge and shape our church structures and leadership. Finally, such groups could lead and champion, in their local areas, conversations on racial justice. It seems to me that taking such steps would ground these conversations in our discipleship models at the local level, but would also help the wider British and Irish church to position itself to challenge the systems around us.

REVD DAVID HASLAM

David is a retired Methodist minister and was Churches Commission for Racial Justice Secretary from 1987 to 1998.

At the time Stephen was murdered I was the Secretary of the Churches Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ) at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The nature of the killing came as a horrible shock, although not a great surprise, as the CCRJ was well aware that levels of racial violence were rising all the time. We were hearing from around the country of incidents ranging from verbal to physical attacks, and unfortunately neither the Government nor the police were doing enough to address the issue.

We got in touch with the Lawrence family and their supporters quite early, and the more we learned of the case, the more certain we became not only that this was a racist attack, but also that the police had totally failed to do their job. It was not long before it was clear that some kind of campaign would be needed and as, at the time, the CCRJ was responsible for a Racial Justice Projects Fund, we were able to make what I believe was the first modest grant to the campaign.

I personally was therefore much more involved at a national level than at local church level, although the local church I attended, the Lambeth Methodist Mission, was also shocked and angry, especially when we heard Stephen's family were Methodists. The CCRJ continued to support the family and the campaign over the months and years ahead.

The following year, as part of a tribute to Stephen, we prepared a 'Racial Harassment' education pack, which carried a poster of him in his football shirt on the front. We made a tape of others who had suffered racial attacks, including the Conservative Mayor of Windsor and Maidenhead, Baroness Flather, who had had bricks thrown through her kitchen window. The CCRJ had actually worked with her to strengthen the 1991 Criminal Justice Act to urge more consistent reporting of racial violence.

In too many ways the stories in that pack, and the suggestions for action, are still the same. It means watching out for racist remarks and comments in public, no matter how they are finessed, tackling statements in the local paper and social media, watching carefully police behaviour and challenging them when appropriate, and continuous monitoring of our MPs to bring local issues to their attention and urge them to speak out.

I was told by a very senior leader that such initiatives – which took place quite often under the British Council of Churches – could lead to the collapse of the Churches Together structures.

Through our work with the Lawrence family, we were able to support their private prosecution when the Crown Prosecution Service failed them. We were also able to have Neville Lawrence speak at a CTBI Church Leaders' meeting, and I was bitterly disappointed when the leaders failed to challenge the authorities to strengthen the law. I was told by a very senior leader that such initiatives – which took place quite often under the British Council of Churches – could lead to the collapse of the Churches Together structures. Neville wasn't too surprised; he was used to institutional inertia.

However, what happened to Stephen did create the kind of atmosphere that enabled us to bring Racial Justice Sunday from Methodism, where the Race Relations Committee had initiated it, into the ecumenical sphere. When the CCRJ proposed it during the furore after Stephen's death, and backed as we were by the Black Majority Churches, it was impossible for the 'traditional churches' to resist. Hence Racial Justice Sunday is also a part of Stephen's legacy, in addition to his name always being a reminder of the racism that lurks always just below the surface of British – and indeed all White Western – society.

When I became a local minister again in south London at the end of the nineties, I was able to have Doreen, Stephen's mother, come and speak at our church, much to the interest and support of the multiracial congregation. I was also part-time Methodist chaplain in Brixton Prison, and the Governor was delighted to have Neville come in and talk to groups of young prisoners, telling them that what he had had to deal with in his life was much tougher than anything they had experienced, and it was time they pulled themselves together and made something of their lives. Both Doreen and Neville expressed their faith in direct and practical terms, though understandably I fear sometimes to hold on to that faith was very hard.

PROFESSOR ANTHONY G. REDDIE

Anthony is Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture, Regent's Park College, The University of Oxford, and an Extraordinary Professor of the University of South Africa.

On 22 April 1993, I was a youth worker for the Methodist church in north Birmingham, in the adjoining areas of Handsworth and Lozells. Stephen Lawrence's murder sent an icy chill through my veins. My then work brought me into contact with a plethora of young Black men who were not unlike Stephen Lawrence. Stephen came from a respectable, hardworking Black family. He was not the type of Black person who should be on the front pages of the tabloids or the lead story on the national and local news.

Like many Christian Black people, I had grown up against the backdrop of a form of neo-colonial 'respectability politics', in which migrant communities are encouraged to focus on good behaviour and a desperate desire to be acceptable to the broader White British population. Bad things only happened to disruptive and transgressive Black people who were 'troublemakers' not playing by the rules. I remember the visceral chill I felt when I heard that Stephen Lawrence had been a churchgoer, a Methodist in fact. He was not unlike the many young people I had met in the work I then did as a youth and community worker.

Handsworth and Lozells Methodist churches, for whom I worked, had, in previous years, a strong tradition of social radicalism. Unlike many of their neighbouring churches, these two congregations had pioneered the fight against racism. Supplementary or Saturday schools had been pioneered by both churches, in addition to employing a youth worker to engage with community action on their behalf. I was the successor of that tradition. I had started in my role as a youth and community worker the previous year.

Sadly, by April 1993, these were elderly congregations whose radicalism had largely evaporated. Consequently, when news of Stephen Lawrence's death began to circulate across the country, little was said or done in either of these churches. In fact, I don't remember much social action at all from churches in Birmingham – certainly not from Methodist ones. The activism that erupted came from the wider Black communities in Birmingham, many of them a sort of leftover from the heyday of the Pan African and Black Nationalist movements of the 1970s. Very little emerged from churches.

Looking back 30 years, the disengagement of the church from the social issues facing Black people is a reminder of the spiritualisation of the Christian faith. Dr Delroy Wesley Hall, the leading Black Pastoral theologian in Britain, in his book *A Redemption Song*,^{vii} speaks of Black people living in Britain struggling with a

vii Delroy Hall, *A Redemption Song: Illuminations on Black British Pastoral Theology and Culture* (London: SCM Press, 2021).

form of 'existential crucifixion', i.e., Black people are mired in our continued 'Holy Saturday' following our social and collective social crucifixion, but with no 'Easter Sunday' on the horizon. Hall's writing reminds us of the social context of the Christian faith. All Christian faith is lived in particular social contexts. For faith to be effective and relevant, it must speak to the social contexts in which it is earthed.

In 1993, Black theology in Britain was in its infancy. This was five years before Robert Beckford's first ever Black theology in Britain text, *Jesus is Dread*.^{viii} In using the term 'Black theology', I mean a radical rethinking of how we conceive of God and Jesus in light of the ongoing suffering and oppression of Black

Bad things only happened to disruptive and transgressive Black people who were 'troublemakers' not playing by the rules.

people in a world run and governed by White people. Black theology identifies God revealed in Jesus as committed to liberation and freeing Black people from racism and oppression. There is little doubt that, 30 years on, Black theology has grown in the UK. It has assisted in mobilising greater social radicalism in Britain from Black people and the various churches to which they belong. Our collective existential crucifixion as Black people still exists, but the

church is no longer as silent as was the case in previous years. Racial justice is central to the work of many of our churches, with many having denominational officers whose work is focused on faith-based, inspired activism seeking to eliminate racism in church and the wider society.

Stephen Lawrence's death was a paradigm-shifting moment. His senseless murder led to a landmark report that finally admitted what many of us had known for decades, namely that systemic racism stalks this country like a ravenous wolf that will not be slayed by studious inaction or by a disengaged spiritualised form of Christianity. As the author of the book of James in the New Testament reminds us, 'faith without works is... dead' (James 2:14-26).

viii Robert Beckford, *Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998).

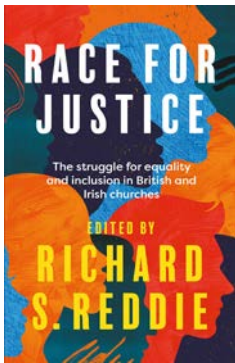
And what does the Lord require
of you but to do justice, and
to love kindness, and to walk
humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8

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RACE FOR JUSTICE

Race for Justice is an in-depth exploration of the responses of individual church denominations, parachurch groups, Christian congregations and churches collectively in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland to address racism over the last 25 years, and the extent to which these responses have been successful. The contributors are all experts in this field and represent all the major historic denominations and churches in Britain and Ireland. This book aims to be a catalyst and a call to action to bring racial justice to our streets and workplaces, as well as to make our churches truly welcoming and diverse.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Richard Reddie is the Director of Justice and Inclusion at CTBI.

The authors are:

- **Right Revd Canon Dr Rosemarie Mallett**, Bishop of Croydon (born in Barbados).
- **Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal OBE**, founder and President of City of Sanctuary, recipient of the World Methodist Peace Award.
- **Rev Wale Hudson-Roberts**, Baptist Union of Great Britain Justice Enabler.
- **Edwina Pearl**, Diversity and Inclusion Co-ordinator for Britain Yearly Meeting, working with the Quakers.
- **Paul Parker**, Recording Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting (most senior Quaker role in Britain).
- **Richard Zipfel**, former advisor on race and community for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, trustee for Catholic Association for Racial Justice.
- **Sandra Ackroyd**, working in racial justice advocacy for more than 30 years with the United Reformed Church.
- **Mark Sturge**, former General Director of African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance.
- **Rev Arlington Trotman**, Methodist minister, former moderator for Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe.
- **Rev Mandy Ralph**, Church of Scotland minister working in social justice and inclusion.
- **Canon Aled Edwards OBE**, Chief Executive of Churches Together in Wales, Secretary of Interfaith Council for Wales.
- **Damian Jackson**, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches (formerly Programme Officer working in migration and asylum issues).
- **Jonny Smith**, The Salvation Army intercultural mission enabler.
- **Richard Daly**, Communications and Media Director for British Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
- **Rev Sivakumar Rajagopalan**, former Regional Manager for Racial Justice with London Baptists.

Order

Race for Justice is available from [Lion Hudson](#) and [Amazon](#)

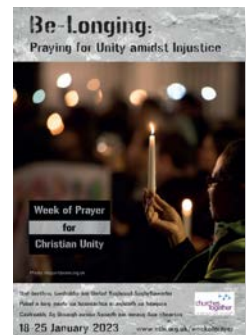
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from the 18th to the 25th January – the octave of St. Peter and St. Paul. However, some areas observe it at Pentecost or some other time.

INTRODUCTION

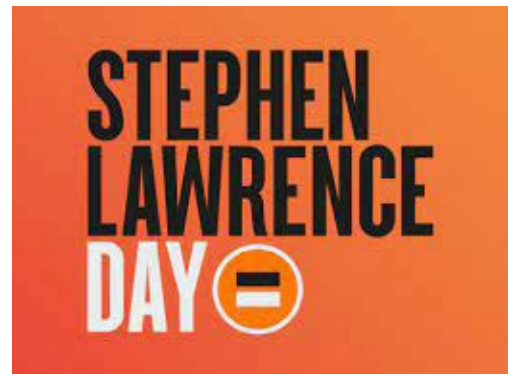
For this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we are guided by the churches of Minneapolis as we seek to explore how the work of Christian unity can contribute to the promotion of racial justice across all levels of society. Through this resource, the CTBI writers' group has also focussed our attention on the 30th anniversary of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, which we mark in 2023. The work of restoring hope through justice undertaken in Stephen's memory continues to inspire and change lives for the better.

As we join with other Christians around the world for the Week of Prayer we pray that our hearts will be open to see and hear the many ways in which racism continues to destroy lives, and to discern the steps we can take as individuals and communities to heal the hurts and build a better future for everyone.



STEPHEN LAWRENCE DAY

Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation exists to inspire a more equal, inclusive society, and to foster opportunities for marginalised young people in the UK. The Foundation was established amid unprecedented growing global awareness of racial inequality, and has been working tirelessly with stakeholders in education, business, and government to develop a framework that will become the bedrock of the Foundation's future work.



It also takes forward the annual Stephen Lawrence Day activities, which are marked officially in the British calendar (on 22 April) as a celebration of Stephen's life and legacy.

Stephen Lawrence Foundation's work includes:

- **Classrooms:** Inspire children to dream freely without barriers and to realise the absolute importance of education to attaining those dreams
- **Communities:** To support and create new connections within all types of communities
- **Careers:** To give marginalised young people access to careers in the world's leading companies and organisations.

RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY 2023



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