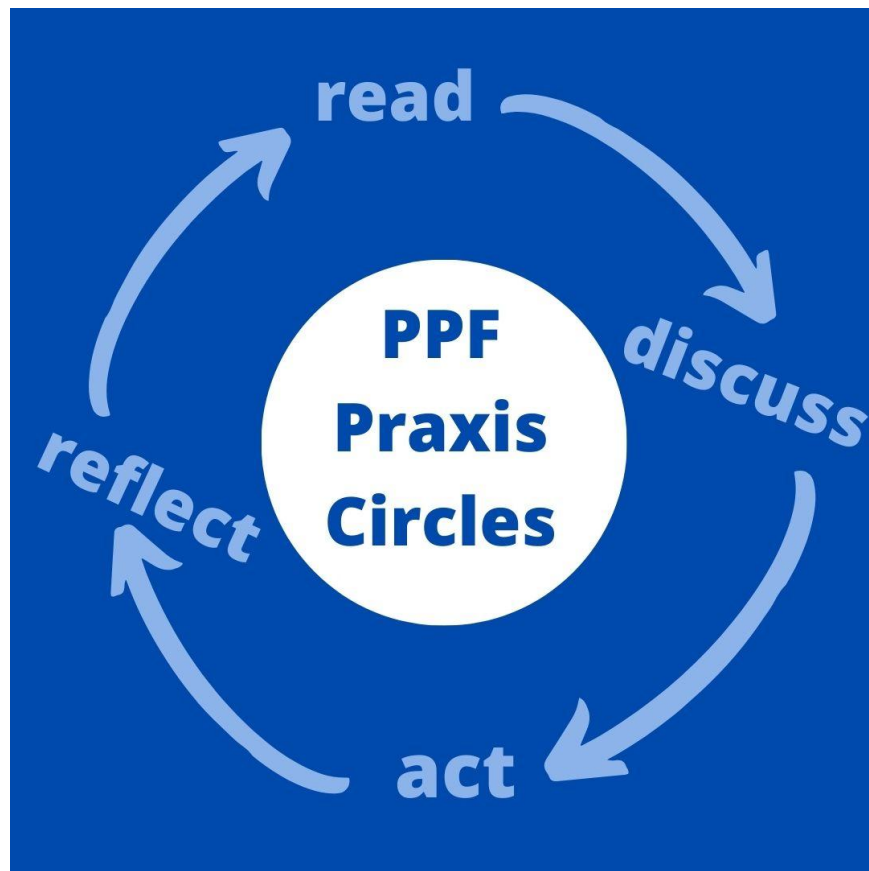




Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

2021 Abolition Reader



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Table of Contents

Praxis Circle Goals	2
Group Commitments	2
Weekly Session Outline	2
Week 1 - Embodiment	3
Week 2 - White Supremacy Cultural Values	3
Week 3 - Abolition	4
Week 4 - Storytelling	4
Week 5 - De-escalation	5
Week 6 - Police & Policing	5
Week 7 - Mutual Aid	6
Week 8 - Vision	7

Welcome to PPF Praxis Circles! This document will guide us through conversation and action over the next 8 weeks. There is preparatory reading (sometimes watching or listening) for you to complete before each section meeting - all resources are linked. If you cannot access any of the resources through the embedded links, please let your facilitator know! After each session, there will be an action item to complete before the next meeting. You'll need a journal for your reflections throughout the series. **Here's to learning and growing together!**

Praxis Circle Goals

- Explore abolition to be familiar with the framework, to “live into the story of abolition”
- Practice taking action to be ready for bigger/deeper action requests
- Do some research on our individual local landscapes

Group Commitments

Praxis Circle participants are asked to commit to these four ways of engaging with each other:

- Share the mic.
 - Notice how much space you're taking up in conversation, and be okay speaking less frequently than you might want to.
 - Leave room for silence, so that internal process-ers have opportunities to share too.
- Throw glitter, not shade.
 - Recognize that intent is not the same as impact, and be willing to hear the impact your words caused even if it was different than what you intended.
 - Speak from your own experience and recognize that others are doing the same - celebrate the differences.
 - Lessons leave and stories stay; please respect confidentiality for others' stories shared here. You are welcome and encouraged to share your learning in your own voice when we leave here.
- Turn to wonder.
 - Wonder why someone said something, and ask clarifying questions.
 - Hold grace for yourself and each other.
 - Be curious & get creative
- Expect unfinished business.

Weekly Session Outline

This may change based on your group's needs and process, but here is a general outline of how sessions will go:

- Community building - [Breath prayer](#) & check-in (10 min)
- Share-back from last week's action (20 min)
- Reflect on the resource for this week (20 min)
- What's coming next (10 min)
- Close with prayer or poem

Week 1 - Embodiment

“White supremacy doesn’t live just in our thinking brains. It lives and breathes in our bodies. If we are to upend the status quo of white-body supremacy, we must begin with our bodies.”

-Resmaa Menakem, [My Grandmother’s Hands](#)

- Goal: Begin to orient in and connect with our bodies so we can expand our capacity to better align our actions with our values.
- Before today’s session, please read [Chapter 2](#) from *The Politics of Trauma* by Staci K. Haines (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2019) (starts on next page of this document)
- Questions to journal through while/after you read:
 - In reflecting on institutions that have shaped you, were they systems of power-over or power-with?
 - Who is (systemically) offered safety, belonging, dignity and resources in these sites and who is not?
 - As you reflect, what do you notice in your body?
- Post-session action item: Practice [body centered awareness](#) once a day.

Week 2 - White Supremacy Cultural Values

“Culture is powerful precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify.” -Tema Okun

- Goal: Familiarize ourselves with white dominant cultural values (and explore connections to church).
- Before today’s session, please read “White Supremacy Culture” by Tema Okun (both links below are to the same information -- presented just in words one way, and more graphically in the other)
 - [Words](#)
 - [Graphic](#)
- Questions to journal through while/after you read:
 - Diving deep into vulnerability, how do you see one or two of these values showing up in your life and work?
 - What is scary about practicing the “antidotes” to the values you struggle with?
 - Thinking about the characteristic that you most tend to be drawn into, what would need to change in your life or community to move toward the “antidotes”?
- Questions for reflection on last week’s action:
 - How did it feel to check in with your body regularly?
 - What did you notice? What surprised you?
- Post-session action item: Talk to someone at your church about the white cultural values and where you see them showing up at your church. Do they have a different view than you do?

Week 3 - Abolition

“Diverting money away from police means this money can go towards resources like safe and accessible housing; education and youth programs; community-based food banks and gardens; neighborhood trauma centers and non-coercive mental healthcare. Why can’t we have free and accessible public transportation, healthcare, and education?” -K. Agbebiyi, Sarah T. Hamid, Rachel Kuo, and Mon Mohapatra, “Abolition Cannot Wait: Visions for Transformation and Radical World-Building”

- Goal: Begin to see abolition theologically, and as work that includes both divestment and investment.
- Before today’s session, please read [SURJ "G-d is An Abolitionist + Community Safety for All Congregational Toolkit Abolition Cannot Wait](#)
- Questions to journal through while/after you read:
 - What happens in your body when you hear or read about abolition?
 - What ideas or interpretations in the reading were new to you?
 - How does your tradition talk about punishment? How do our tradition’s ideas about punishment tie into white supremacy and oppression?
- Questions for reflection on last week’s action:
 - What was it like to talk about white cultural values?
 - What did you learn?
 - If you didn’t complete last week’s action, what stopped you? What fears did you encounter?
- Post-session action item: Research your area’s police budget + read one recent news article involving police.

Week 4 - Storytelling

“To win, we must exercise political imagination and stretch the terms of what is deemed ‘politically realistic’ in the present moment. Imagination builds power because it opens the space for crafting stories that make just futures possible.” -Center for Story-Based Strategy

- Goal: Talk about the kinds of stories we tell and tell different stories, making connections to faith narratives.
- Before today’s session, please read [Story Telling Based Strategies Core Concepts](#) and complete the worksheets using [“Why PPF is doing a 6-month deep focus on #DefundThePolice”](#)
- Questions to journal through while/after you read:
 - What kinds of assumptions do we make and use in storytelling? How do they benefit us and how do they limit us?
 - What attributes of white supremacy do we see in this story?
 - What is the conflict and point of intervention in this story?
 - Who are the characters - who is the villain and who is the hero?
- Questions for reflection on last week’s action:

- What kind of story does our police budget tell about our city? Who is the villain and who is the hero?
- What story is told in the local news article you reviewed?
- Post-session action item: A major part of storytelling is the point of conflict. Think about a time you were in conflict - write down what happened and what manifested in your body.

Week 5 - De-escalation

“When we perceive threat and experience stress, our nervous systems respond with what we need to save our lives. This moment is no different. We can be grateful for the wisdom of our bodies that know how to turn up and at the same time we can self and co-regulate our nervous systems to cycle down so that we can be in the work of justice for the long haul.” - Prentis Hemphill

- Goal: I know what my instinctive reaction is in times of escalation, and I have some ideas on how I want to react instead.
- Before today’s session, please follow the video from PPF guiding you through a de-escalation practice. (Video will be shared before Week 4)
- The video will include some reflection questions for journaling.
- Question to reflection on last week’s action:
 - What did you notice about conflicts you’ve experienced before, thinking about them in the storytelling framework?
- Post-session action item: Have a conversation about white supremacy cultural values with someone at your church. This time, practice channeling your “de-escalation animal.”

Week 6 - Police & Policing

“Police brutality has been the single most important political rallying cry across Black communities for decades, because it is the most visceral evidence of the second-class citizenship of poor and working-class African-Americans. When the police can stop and question you, frisk and beat you, potentially arrest and occasionally murder you, then you are not an equal citizen. “ -Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

- Goal: We know the history of police as an institution & how it came to be.
- Before today’s session, please:
 - [Listen to this one hour podcast on the history of policing.](#)
 - [Watch this 5 minute video](#) on how the 2nd Amendment is connected to today’s policing.
- Questions to journal through while/after you listen and watch:
 - What were you taught about the police growing up?
 - What is your experience with police? Has this experience shifted those messages or have they remained the same?

- How does your tradition talk about punishment? How do our tradition's ideas about punishment tie into white supremacy and oppression?
- In his book *My Grandmother's Hands*, Resmaa Menakem says "The white body sees itself as fragile and vulnerable, and it looks to police bodies for its protection and safety." What makes you feel safe? What role do guns and the police play in your sense of safety?
- Question for reflection on last week's action:
 - Did you experience this conversation differently with de-escalation practice? (Compared to the conversation you had in the second week.) How did your bodily awareness change the way you engaged in conversation?
- Post-session action item: Send a letter to your city council ward representative and president expressing your opinion regarding the police budget for your locality. Use <https://defund12.org/> to find a draft letter example from a city in your state!

Week 7 - Mutual Aid

"At this moment of global pandemic, racist violence, and economic strife, it is evident that structures in our society leading to inequality and systemic oppression create chaos and harm everyone. Creating new structures of collective care can help us through this period, and engaging in mutual aid is a way for us to build new social relationships that recognize the importance of our solidarity." *-Mary Zerkel, American Friends Service Committee*

- Goal: We recognize mutual aid and community safety practices as life-giving alternatives to policing - knowing that the needs and resources in every community are different.
- Before today's session, watch [this 8-minute video on Mutual Aid](#), and explore this [database of localized resources](#) to see if your city has its own mutual aid network. (Here is a [Mutual Aid 101 toolkit](#) to learn how to set up a mutual aid network in your community.)
- Questions to journal through while/after you explore:
 - What are the ways that charity is policing?
 - What are the ways in which we/our church is complacent in charity?
 - What are the ways we/our church is participating in solidarity? Why? If none, why not?
- Question for reflection on last week's action:
 - How did that go? Did you get a response? What did you learn?
 - What was that like for you?
 - How did you choose who to write to?
- Post-session action item: Using the storytelling guide from session 4, write your own story of the world you want to live in (less than one page). Create a visual of your community without police and take a picture of it, email it to your facilitator.

Week 8 - Vision

*"We can imagine so much!
We can only imagine so much.*

*If perhaps it is a function of our collective minds
A dream of our endless nights
Then there will be abundance so long as we can imagine it" -adrienne maree brown*

- Goal: We can tell a story about the world we want to build, and cast a vision for our work
- Before today's session, watch [this 4-minute video](#), looking for the impact of visual images and parts of storytelling.
- Questions to journal through in preparation for this week:
 - Why are the issue areas featured in the image you created important to you and your community?
 - Share your story with image. What are some ideas you have about how we can address issues of public safety without relying on police or policing?
 - What theologies, practices, interpretations need transformation or need to be let go of entirely in order to build the just world we dream of?
- Question for reflection on last week's action:
 - What was easy about creating this vision? What was challenging?
- Post-session action item: Share your story. You could use it as a letter to the editor or op ed; share on social media; send it as a PPF blog post; add it to your church newsletter...