

Racial Justice and Healing Church of Excellence Award Criteria

The following is a list of practices and resources believed to help a United Methodist congregation make disciples and experience transformation in Christ, by actively seeking Racial Justice and Healing among themselves, and within their community. The North Georgia congregations who engage these practices as described within an appointment year can make application, and be recognized publicly at Annual Conference as a Church of Excellence in this area of ministry focus. This work is acknowledged by award at three different levels. Level 1 is for churches just beginning to engage this focus. Level 2 is for churches who have practical experience in this area and seek to deepen their engagement further. Level 3 is for those churches who have committed themselves to this work as a defining way of living Christian faith as a congregation. Each award level is named in memory of a pioneer whose life offered exceptional witness to this work.

Wohlgemuth Award

In Memory of Rev. Dr. Paul Wohlgemuth and Comelia Montgomery Wohlgemuth

<http://catalog.gcah.org/DigitalArchives/memoirs/Wohlgemuth%20Paul.pdf>

Level 1 Award - for churches beginning the work of racial justice and healing (must meet at least five from Level 1)

1. Examined the founding and history of the church, made updates to the church's historical statement to accurately address the church's racial history, and shared it with the congregation.
2. Examined the racial history of the UMC and shared it with the broader congregation.
3. Offered at least 1 book study on racial justice and healing, and finished the book in the last year.
4. Welcomed a guest preacher whose race and/or ethnicity differs from the dominant race in the congregation.
5. Pastor has preached a 3 part sermon series on racism, anti-racism, or racial healing, and offered a time for discussion with congregants following worship.
6. Invited someone from a Conference or Connectional racial healing and advocacy organization (ex. Conference Commission on Religion and Race) to teach or preach at the church.
7. Sent a pastor AND a lay person to the Racial Justice and Healing Academy.
8. Partnered with a neighboring congregation whose members are of a different racial or ethnic identity for worship, spiritual formation, scriptural study, mission, and/or community engagement.

Rodriguez Award

In Memory of Rev. Joel Rodriguez

<https://www.roydavisfuneralhome.com/obituary/joel-rodriguez>

Level 2 Award - for churches who have been engaged in racial justice and healing ministry inside of their local church (must meet at least five from Level 1 and seven from Level 2)

1. Offered implicit bias, anti-racism, and/or cultural competency trainings for church leadership.
2. Completed at least 2 book studies in the past year on anti-racism. One study should specifically explore the theological foundations of racial diversity and inclusion.

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3. Hosted a racial justice event for the congregation and the community.
4. Demonstrates annual contributions (2 years minimum) to a racial justice organization outside of the church.
5. Publicly recognized and participated in history months for racial groups represented in the community
6. When an incident of racial violence and injustice occurs - locally, nationally, or internationally - the church demonstrates its ability to address it via sermons, dialogue, resistance, and peaceful response, including reparation.
7. Church leadership reflects the racial diversity of the congregation with aims to reflect the diversity of the community.
8. For churches with open staff positions: Intentionally marketed programming staff openings to candidates beyond the racial majority of the congregation, and/or has hired a person of color or non-majority racial identity on the programming staff
9. Created a local church Commission on Religion and Race or an equivalent group that reports to the church council and has access to budgeted funds.
10. Formed ongoing partnership with another church in the local community to advocate for and practice racial healing.

Lowery Award

In Memory of Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery and Dr. Evelyn Gibson Lowery

Dr. Joseph Lowery Bio - https://www.nps.gov/features/malu/feat0002/wof/joseph_lowery.htm

Dr. Evelyn Gibson Lowery Bio - <https://sclcwomeninc.com/team/dr-evelyn-gibson-lowery/>

Level 3 Award - for churches who have been engaged in racial justice and healing ministry inside the local church and in the local community (must meet at least five from Level 1, seven from Level 2, and six from Level 3)

1. Started a racial history tour around the community where the church is located.
2. Participates in local community resistance efforts.
3. Partners with businesses led by people of color in the local community.
4. Designates funds in the church's annual budget to do the work of racial justice and healing. These funds should constitute at least 1% of the total annual budget.
5. Advocates to civic leaders on behalf of people of color and WITH people of color.
6. Organizes trips for the congregation to visit locations of racial and cross-cultural significance.
7. Practices radical welcome and inclusivity by regularly incorporating a diversity of languages, traditions, culturally and racially-significant Christian practices in congregational worship, community gatherings, and shared meals.
8. Working for racial healing locally in education, housing, employment, criminal justice, healthcare, and other systems of racial oppression.

To apply at any level, please complete the online application, including uploading documents and supplemental materials illustrating what your congregation did to satisfy each requirement, and narrative reflection regarding the transformation that took place. Questions? Please email Dr. Brian Tillman, Director of Inclusion and Advocacy, brian.tillman@ngumc.net.