

Holy Conversations about Race: A Curriculum for Predominantly White Congregations



PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE SESSION FOUR: “In Their Own Words: Eyewitness Accounts from the 1921 Race Riot/Massacre”

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SESSION FOUR: “In Their Own Words”

LEADER’S OR COORDINATOR’S NOTES FOR SESSION FOUR:

1. **Sessions Two through Seven** are the heart of the curriculum. Sessions Two and Three together formed the “Learning” (Contextualizing, Seeing) component of Holy Conversations, and focused on Black wall Street before May 30, 1921, and the events of those awful days. Sessions Four and Five together form the “Reflecting” (Connecting, Hearing) component of Holy Conversations.
2. In this session, Session Four, the **Focus Presentation video is on the events of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot/Massacre through the eyes of survivors and some White participants and “observers.”** This is a lengthy 32-minute video.
3. Please remember to **hand out the Session Five Readings at the end of this session.**

FOR SESSION FOUR YOUR GROUP WILL NEED:

- Enough copies of the Session Four curriculum for all group participants.
- Enough copies of the Session Five preparation Readings for all group participants.
- Enough copies of (or a wall poster, etc., of) each group’s Holy Conversations Covenant for all participants.
- Access to or the file for the Focus Presentation video, and a way for all participants to view it together (projection, TV monitor, etc.). You can download this video (and this curriculum) online at www.holyconversations.church/file-share. Videos can be streamed full screen without needing to downloading them to a USB, etc., at www.holyconversations.church/session-four.
- Enough pens, pencils and writing paper for all participants.

SESSION FOUR: “In Their Own Words”

SESSION FOUR GOALS

By the end of Session Four,

1. you will have listened to several eyewitness accounts of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot/Massacre;
2. you will have received Session Four study materials (this document);
3. you will have practiced elements of your group covenant in guiding today’s Holy Conversations about “the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot/massacre,” and in particular will have explored empathy and “walking in another’s shoes;” and,
4. you will have received the Readings in preparation for Session Four.

1. WATCH THE FOCUS PRESENTATION VIDEO: “In Their Own Words”

Following the Focus Presentation video, please remain silent and “S-I-T” with yourself. Ask yourself silently: “In this video, what about it was the

most S-surprising? (that is, something you did not know before)
most I-nteresting? (that is, something you want to learn more about)
most T-roubling?” (that is, something that raises strong emotions in you)

Jot down a few of your thoughts to these three questions to consider talking about in the small group session.

3. ENTER INTO SMALL GROUP HOLY CONVERSATIONS

- a. Review together your Covenant and agree to abide by these principles.
- b. Begin with your S-I-T reflections from the Focus Presentation. Invite each participant to share one or more of their three reflections. When all are finished, start your Holy Conversation from these thoughts.
- c. If you need help in jump-starting your Conversations, use the questions found on the following page.
- d. Reserve five minutes before the close of class to share any small group prayer requests. Have a volunteer close your group in prayer.

Storytelling

(adapted from Frances Vitali, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1090163.pdf>)

You've just experienced 30 minutes of personal stories about the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot/Massacre, in addition to your readings preparing you for this week. Since we've already presented the timeline and events surrounding the Race Riot/Massacre, why tell it again through the words of the survivors themselves?

Consider this statement:

“Narrative knowledge [that is, historical storytelling] is experiential and cultural knowing. It is the best means available for students to organize their experiences and make meaning for themselves.”

(Cooper and Collins in Look What Happened to Frog, 1992, p. 5)

Storytelling is “the best means available for students to . . . make meaning for themselves.” Without the personal story, all the events of the Tulsa Race Riot/massacre are just a heap of facts; with storytelling, you have a chance to make sense of all of it, and maybe make sense of yourself as well.

*When a day passes it is no longer there.
What remains of it? Nothing more than a story.
If stories weren't told or books weren't written, man would live
Like beasts - only for a day.
Today, we live, but tomorrow today will be a story.
The whole world, all human life, is one long story.*

(I.B. Singer in Cooper and Collins in Look What Happened to Frog, 1992, p. 8)

Stories are aural, oral, literary human expressions; human extensions and human technologies designed to explain who we are, how we come to know, how we negotiate meaning, and how we communicate. Language is the earliest human technology and stories are a natural extension of who we are as human beings; giving meaning to and extracting meaning from our world. “Story is our DNA. We are myth incarnate” (Durnin. . . King truthfully declares that stories are all we are. “We live by stories and we live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves” (Okri).

“No one has to tell us, or teach a child, to perceive life in terms of stories; it is what everyone does. The total of facts and figures that we all collect -- a few statistics, telephone numbers, birthdays, addresses -- is minuscule compared with all the complex stories contained within the brain.”

(Smith, *To Think*, 1990)