

ST. JAMES UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

135 Myrtle Avenue
Havertown, PA 19083



ASH WEDNESDAY

February 14, 2018

This year we are recognizing and celebrating Ash Wednesday **not through a formal scheduled service of worship**, but rather through “***presenting our bodies to God, which is your spiritual worship***” (Romans 12:1). We are hoping that on Ash Wednesday (sometime during the day or evening) you will **open your mind, heart, hands to looking at your own prejudices and how God might be calling you to address your and society’s prejudices.**

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, and thus we open with a call to repentance. We start the Lenten season by saying to ourselves and God that we have not been or done what God has asked us to do and be. Given this year’s focus of Lent on the book of Amos and “Roll Down, Justice!” we are concentrating this Ash Wednesday on prejudice: what it is, our part in it, and what we might do as a sign of our repentance and willingness to do what is right in God’s sight, so that we can be all God intends for us.

READ: PREJUDICE AND THE BIBLE

Jesus was a victim of both religious and racial discrimination. Israel was under occupation by the Roman Empire, causing tension and animosity on both sides. There was hatred between the Jews and their neighbors of mixed race, the Samaritans (i.e. people from a region called Samaria). Jews did not consider these people ‘pure’: although they were of Jewish descent, they had intermarried with other races, something forbidden in the Torah.

In his teaching, Jesus challenged the prejudices of the people of his day. Jews and Samaritans would not even talk to each other. In the famous ‘Parable of the Good Samaritan’, Jesus makes a Samaritan the hero who stopped to help an injured Jew (Luke 10:30 – 37). A Samaritan is also the only one who returned to thank Jesus from a group of 10 lepers healed by him (Luke 17:11-19). In John’s gospel, Jesus makes a point of stopping at a Samaritan village and talking with a Samaritan woman (which would have been two counts against her). He treats her with courtesy and respect which proves to be a life-transforming encounter for her (John 4:1 – 42). In this, Jesus exemplifies his own teaching: that Christians should not just tolerate people of all races, but that they should actively show love to all, even their enemies.

‘Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you.’ (Jesus – Luke 6:27).

It is clear that the first disciples were not above prejudice. Even Peter was prejudiced – see his experience at Joppa (Acts 10:9-23), where God had to challenge his prejudices regarding Gentiles. After Jesus’ ascension the new Christian ‘church’ had to rethink its attitude to Gentiles (i.e. non-Jews). Many Jewish Christians believed Gentiles must become Jews before they could become Christians. It was eventually decided at the Council of Jerusalem that Gentiles could now be admitted to the Church without first becoming Jews (Acts 15:5 – 21).

EVALUATE YOURSELF: “SELF ASSESSEMENT”

Take the Personal Self-Assessment of Anti-Bias Behavior

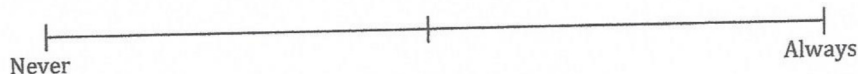
PERSONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ANTI-BIAS BEHAVIOR



Provided by: ADL's
Education Division,
A WORLD OF
DIFFERENCE®
Institute

Directions: Using the rating scale of NEVER to ALWAYS, assess yourself for each item by placing an "X" on the appropriate place along each continuum. When you have completed the checklist, review your responses to identify areas in need of improvement. Create specific goals to address the areas in which you would like to improve.

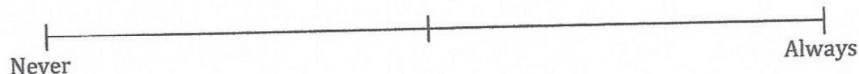
1. I educate myself about the culture and experiences of other racial, religious, ethnic and socioeconomic groups by reading and attending classes, workshops, cultural events, etc.



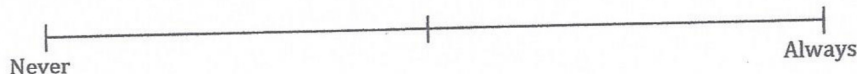
2. I spend time reflecting on my own upbringing and childhood to better understand my own biases and the ways I may have internalized the prejudicial messages I received.



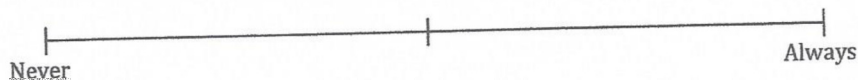
3. I look at my own attitudes and behaviors as an adult to determine the ways they may be contributing to or combating prejudice in society.



4. I evaluate my use of language to avoid terms or phrases that may be degrading or hurtful to other groups.



5. I avoid stereotyping and generalizing other people based on their group identity.



6. I value cultural differences and avoid statements such as "I never think of you as _____," which discredits differences.

Never | Always

7. I am comfortable discussing issues of racism, anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice with others.

Never | Always

8. I am open to other people's feedback about ways in which my behavior may be culturally insensitive or offensive to others.

Never | Always

9. I give equal attention to other people regardless of race, religion, gender, socioeconomic class or other difference.

Never | Always

10. I am comfortable giving constructive feedback to someone of another race, gender, age or physical ability.

Never | Always

11. The value of diversity is reflected in my work, which includes a wide range of racial, religious, ethnic and socioeconomic groups, even when these groups are not personally represented in my community.

Never | Always

12. I work intentionally to develop inclusive practices, such as considering how the time, location and cost of scheduled meetings and programs might inadvertently exclude certain groups.

Never | Always

13. I work to increase my awareness of biased content in television programs, newspapers and advertising.

Never | Always

14. I take time to notice the environment of my home, office, house of worship and children's school, to ensure that visual media represent diverse groups, and I advocate for the addition of such materials if they are lacking.

Never | Always

15. When other people use biased language and behavior, I feel comfortable speaking up, asking them to refrain and stating my reasons.

Never | Always

16. I contribute to my organization's achievement of its diversity goals through programming and by advocating for hiring practices that contribute to a diverse workforce.

Never | Always

17. I demonstrate my commitment to social justice in my personal life by engaging in activities to achieve equity.

Never | Always

Areas of growth: _____

Goals: _____

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Understanding Prejudice

How It Forms and How to Prevent It

By Kendra Cherry
Updated July 05, 2017

Prejudice can have a strong influence on how people behave and interact with others, particularly with those who are different from them. What exactly causes prejudice? Is there anything that can be done to overcome or minimize it?

Prejudice is a baseless and usually negative attitude toward members of a group. Common features of prejudice include negative feelings, stereotyped beliefs, and a tendency to discriminate against members of the group.

While specific definitions of prejudice given by social scientists often differ, most agree that it involves prejudgments (usually negative) about members of a group.

When people hold prejudicial attitudes toward others, they tend to view everyone who fits into a certain group as being "all the same." They paint every individual who holds particular characteristics or beliefs with a very broad brush and fail to really look at each person as a unique individual.

Prejudice can take many forms and can have serious, and often very negative, consequences. Let's take a closer look at some of the most common types of prejudice and explore some of the key reasons that prejudice happens

Different Types of Prejudice

Prejudice can be based upon a number of factors including sex, race, age, sexual orientation, nationality, socioeconomic status, and religion. Some of the most well-known types of prejudice include:

- Racism
- Sexism
- Classicism
- Homophobia
- Nationalism
- Religious prejudice
- Ageism
- Xenophobia

Prejudice and Stereotyping

When prejudice occurs, stereotyping, discrimination, and bullying may also result. In many cases, prejudices are based upon stereotypes. A stereotype is a simplified assumption about a group based on prior experiences or beliefs.

Stereotypes can be both positive ("women are warm and nurturing") or negative ("teenagers are lazy"). Stereotypes can not only lead to faulty beliefs, but they can also result in both prejudice and discrimination.

According to psychologist Gordon Allport, prejudice and stereotypes emerge in part as a result of normal human thinking. In order to make sense of the world around us, it is important to sort information into mental categories.

"The human mind must think with the aid of categories," Allport explained. "Once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends upon it."

In other words, we depend upon our ability to place people, ideas, and objects into different categories in order to make the world simpler and easier to understand. We are simply inundated with too much information to sort through all of it in a logical, methodical, and rational fashion. Being able to quickly categorize information allows us to interact and react quickly, but it also leads to mistakes. Prejudice and stereotyping are just two examples of the mental mistakes that result from our tendency to quickly categorize information in the world around us.

This process of categorization applies to the social world as well, as we sort people into mental groups based on factors such as age, sex, and race.

However, researchers have found that while when it comes to categorizing information about people, we tend to **minimize the differences between people in certain groups** and **exaggerate the differences between groups**. In one classic experiment, participants were asked to judge the height of people shown in photographs. People in the experiment were also told that:

"In this booklet, the men and women are actually of equal height. We have taken care to match the heights of the men and women pictured. That is, for every woman of a particular height, somewhere in the booklet there is also a man of that same height. Therefore, in order to make as accurate a height judgment as possible, try to judge each photograph as an individual case; do not rely on the person's sex."

In addition to these instructions, a \$50 cash prize was offered to whoever made the most accurate judgments of height. Despite this, participants consistently rated the men as being a few inches taller than the women. Because of their prejudgment that men are taller than women, the participants were unable to dismiss their existing categorical beliefs about men and women in order to judge the heights accurately.

Researchers have also found that people tend to view members of outside groups as being more homogenous than members of their own group, a phenomenon referred to as the **out-group homogeneity bias**. This perception that all member of an out-group are alike holds true of all

groups, whether based on race, nationality, religion, age, and other naturally occurring group affiliations. People tend to see individual differences among members of their own groups, they tend to see those who belong to out-groups as being "all the same."

So What Can We Do to Reduce Prejudice?

In addition to looking at the reasons *why* prejudice occurs, researchers have also explored different ways that prejudice can be reduced or even eliminated. Training people to become more empathetic to members of other groups is one method that has shown considerable success. By imaging themselves in the same situation, people are able to think about how they would react and gain a greater understanding of other people's actions.

Other techniques that are used to reduce prejudice include:

- Passing laws and regulations that require fair and equal treatment for all groups of people.
- Gaining public support and awareness for anti-prejudice social norms.
- Making people aware of the inconsistencies in their own beliefs.
- Increased contact with members of other social groups.

Sources:

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Nelson, T. E., Biernat, M. R., & Manis, M. (1990). Everyday Base Rates (Sex Stereotypes): Potent and Resilient. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1990;59: 664-675.

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COMMITMENT TO END PREJUDICE

Demonstrate your willingness to bring about change by checking one of the following areas of commitment.

___ LAWS AND REGULATIONS: I will work toward the passing of laws and regulations that require fair and equal treatment for all groups of people. The group I will work for: _____ (women, African-Americans, immigration...)

___ INCREASE CONTACT: I will increase my contact with members of other social groups. The group with whom I will have more contact: _____

___ OTHER: _____

PRAYER

Pray the prayer below:

To the Creator of all races and peoples, who loves each of us for our uniqueness, we offer our prayers of petition:

- For an end to discrimination in all its forms, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.
- That each person may be respected and valued as a child of God, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.
- That the Church may be a witness and a universal sign of unity among all peoples, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.
- That each of us may acknowledge our part in mistakes and sins of the past pertaining to discrimination and racism, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.
- For a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation among peoples who share a history of mutual mistrust, hatred or aggression, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.
- That the victims of racial prejudice may forgive those who persecute them, and that their persecutors may have a change of heart, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer
- That the Church will continue to strive to make every element of human life correspond to the true dignity of the human person, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.
- For those who have struggled in the past and continue to do so today for civil rights, economic justice and the elimination of discrimination based on race, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.
- For the conversion of the hearts and minds of those who allow another's race to influence their relationships and limit their openness, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.
- That we may work to influence the attitudes of others by expressly rejecting racial stereotypes, slurs and jokes and be affirming of the cultural contributions of every racial group in our world, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.
- That we may make a personal commitment to abolish social structures which inhibit economic, educational and social advancement of the poor, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.
- That we may work for decent working conditions, adequate income, housing, education and health care for all people, we pray ... Lord of all nations, hear our prayer. Almighty God, source of our life, we acknowledge you as Creator of all people of every race, language and

way of life. Help us to see each other as you see us: your sons and daughters loved into being and sustained by your parental care. Keep watch over our hearts so that the evil of racism will find no home with us. Direct our spirits to work for justice and peace so that all barriers to your grace which oppress our brothers and sisters will be removed. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

-- Augustinian Secretariate for Justice and Peace