

S~P~A
Share...Pray...Act
Facilitator's Guide
Women on Mission and
Racial Reconciliation Cohorts



S~P~A: Women on Mission and Racial Reconciliation Cohorts

In this time of racial discontent in our country, we have learned how symbols engender emotions that communicate a social reality for the individual onlooker and people groups. Most certainly what a symbol philosophically means to one person is not always what it means to the other.

As the curriculum designer of S~P~A, I have chosen a symbol to represent our work. The inuksuk is a familiar symbol among indigenous cultures primarily in arctic regions. These indigenous communities take a pile of stones or boulders and build a monument. These stone monuments were constructed by community residents working together.

The monuments were designed to communicate to the weary traveler that humans are here. They served as a guidepost communicating that water or fish could be found in this place. Sometimes, the stone monument communicated that these are sacred grounds.

The practice of using or referring to stones is not unfamiliar in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Stones usually signify strength, steadiness, and durability. In the Old Testament, Jacob used a stone pillow for rest (Genesis 28:11). After arriving in the Promised Land, the Lord instructed Joshua to take 12 men from each tribe to each take a stone from the Jordan River as a sign of remembrance of God's delivering power for Israel (Joshua 4:1-7). In the New Testament, we are reminded, symbolically that Jesus is the chief cornerstone—the sure foundation of our salvation on which all else stands.

If you engage in a S~P~A Cohort you will find yourself in sacred space. You will find yourself in a space where there is bread for the hungry and water for the weary. You will note that the indigenous stone monuments are in the shape of human form. It would be only later in societal development that Europeans would interpret the image as likened to a cross.



As you consider facilitating S~P~A, may God of our weary years and silent tears, bring us in right relationship with the other. May we go forth until justice rolls down like a mighty stream and all of God's children will declare, "be it so."

Respectfully,

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Introduction

In the year that George Floyd was murdered, racial tensions blatantly heightened in our country. It was not enough that partisan politics separated us and that the COVID-19 pandemic crippled us. Now we would witness racial protests, vandalism and violence.

As the Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia (WMUV) serves to equip Christian women to engage the world in relevant ways, S~P~A was born. The acronym stands for share, pray, and act. S~P~A is rooted in the core values of WMU: women gathered for fellowship, prayer and mission action.

S	Share	Participants share stories, perspectives, frustrations, victories, and disappointments.
P	Pray	Participants pray for justice, righteousness, forgiveness, reconciliation, and for a Christian witness.
A	Act	Participants explore options for mission action and education that will meet needs and change world systems.

A. Prepare to Lead a S~P~A cohort

i. Participant Recruitment

The first S~P~A cohort was selected based on involvement with WMUV. Special invitations were sent to the Board of Trustees and other organizational volunteers. Class size was limited to 14.

To begin your recruitment process consider your audience and ask the following questions:

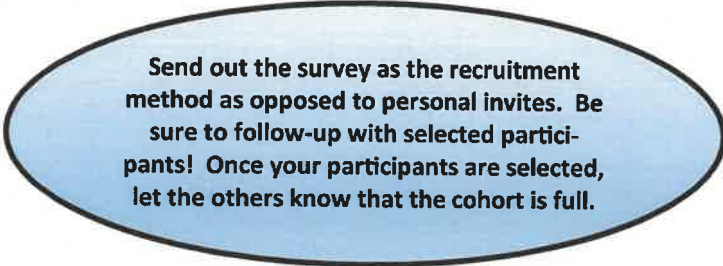
- What is our goal?
- Who are the people seeking cross-racial understanding?

Once these questions are answered, you are ready to begin the recruitment process. **INVITE** prospective participants. Give a solid **DEADLINE** for a response. Following the deadline, compose an email distribution list and **WELCOME** cohort members by email.

ii. Pre-assessment

DEPLOY a survey. This assessment tool will help you to know several things that will help you, navigate the process. You will want to gather the following information in your survey:

1. The name and contact information of potential participant
1. Participant age category
2. Participant race or ethnicity
3. If she is willing to share a personal story related to race ?” Give the options of yes, no and unsure.



Send out the survey as the recruitment method as opposed to personal invites. Be sure to follow-up with selected participants! Once your participants are selected, let the others know that the cohort is full.

Sample Survey

WMU of Virginia Sisters Who Care S~P~A

1. In which race do you identify as?
 - White or Caucasian
 - Black or African American
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Asian or Asian American
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - Another race
2. What is your age range?
 - Under 18
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65+
3. Would you be willing to share a personal story related to race from a life experience?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not sure
4. Please give us your name and email address below:
Name _____ Email _____
5. You will hear from us on or before Sunday, June 28. Thank you!!

iii. Timeline Development

Develop a strict timeline for the 6-week sessions

From the very beginning develop a timeline for every aspect of the process. This will give you a strong healthy framework that is doable.

B. Prepare to Facilitate

Facilitators must be able to:

1. Make a 6-week commitment
2. Prepare agendas prior to each session
3. Communicate by email or phone with participants
4. Stay focused during sessions
5. Listen non-judgmentally
6. Affirm participants feelings, thoughts or perceptions

Listen Non-judgmentally!

One respondent in making introductions referenced the Internal Revenue Service. Although I do not remember the context, I made a guttural sound that communicated disdain for the IRS. I was dealing with my own issues with the IRS and thereby could have alienated the participant

More Tips!

- 1. A facilitator must be unbiased! Be as neutral as possible in statements, body language and facial expressions.**
- 2. A facilitator should arrive to the meeting prior to the participants to welcome each participant with the goal of nurturing a comfortable environment.**
- 3. A facilitator should have all necessary items at her station prior to the session. This includes online sessions so you will not have to step away from the e-session.**
- 4. A facilitator must have some basic knowledge about the group facilitation process.**

It's a Process!

One respondent was so angry about racism from personal and systemic perspectives that she was ready to quite the process after the first session. She felt that other participants did not understand her frustrations. After 6-weeks, she testified that she was glad that she stayed in the group as she finally felt that she was being heard. The facilitator was patient because she understood the process.

Prior to advertising and recruiting for the sessions, it is important that certain tasks are accomplished:

Prayer – In seeking Shalom between race and ethnicities in a fragmented world, one must first seek the Prince of Peace through prayer. Philippians 4:6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

Seek God First!

The vision for S~P~A came to me in my early morning prayer time. I knew that I had to make a statement in our newsletter but did not want to be hasty or emotionally reactive. I waited for several weeks. One morning in early prayer, I was reflecting on the core values of WMU: Women’s fellowship, prayer and mission action. I saw in my minds-eye, SPA. I was assured that any ministry that we host, promote or partner must be rooted in the core values of our mission.

Inform Stakeholders – If you are engaging S~P~A facilitation in the name of your church, non-profit, or of another body you will need to brief your stakeholders. Many people are not comfortable with taboo subjects. Talking about race, like talking about politics can cause internal conflict and misunderstandings. Usually this dynamic does not make for shalom.

Communicate!

All the stakeholders for WMUV were informed of the S~P~A vision. Every stakeholder was not in favor of the implementation of such a project. After all, race riots were happening all over the country. I recognized that one's mission passion and comfort level is not necessarily that of another. Explaining S~P~A and allowing feedback for understanding, we were able to implement the process. To mitigate tension among stakeholders, we chose to open this opportunity to WMU leaders first. Publishing regular reports also helped to keep stakeholders aware of what was going on.

Familiarity with theological concepts – The facilitator should be aware of what she believes of the Kingdom of God. Although not all participants need to believe the same thing biblically or denominationally, the facilitator must be solid in her beliefs and able to reflect on biblical concepts such as reconciliation, shalom, and forgiveness.

Familiarity with concepts related to race and racism in America – It would help if the facilitator is familiar with key definitions and concepts related to the study of race and ethnicity. Prejudice, racism, and stereotypes mean different things in the study of race and ethnicity.

Prejudice – *noun* – preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.

Racism – *noun* – the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another.

Stereotype – *noun* – a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Familiarity does not mean that you will necessarily use these concepts during your reflection on the sessions. Familiarity will ground your facilitation skills in a knowledge base that will show confidence.

C. Lead S~P~A Sessions

i. Lead the first S~P~A cohort session

Introductions – At the first meeting, invite participants to make introductions. Each should be given 5-minutes to share. It is suggested in the email sent a week prior, that participants share their names, town, and the conditions in which they were raised in terms of social class and race.

Following the introductions, call for in prayer asking for volunteers to lead. Give final announcements about what will happen in Session #2. Have two women volunteer to share their stories for the next session.

Clarify Parameters!

Our sessions were scheduled for an hour and a-half. The first session went over 2-hours. Although I had sent out a very detailed agenda, it was obvious that some participants did not review it. As a result, 5-minute introductions became 12-minute introductions. Some participants proceeded to share their stories of racial conflict. As this was the group bonding meeting, I did not act authoritative as not to alienate participants on the first night. The women had something to say but this was not the time for it given the dynamics of the group process. It was also important to respect the time commitment of participants. Half-way through, I realized that I should have verbally stated much more clearly our goals for that night and the criteria.

ii. Lead S~P~A cohort sessions 2 through 5

Pre-Session – Arrive early to allow time for participants to connect.

Welcome – Greet participants and remember to state your purpose. It is here that you may want to inform or remind the audience of which church, denominational body or group that is sponsoring S~P~A.

Opening Prayer – Open your meeting in prayer asking God to be present. You may choose to invite a volunteer to offer prayer as to nurture participant engagement.

Storying – Introduce the storytellers for the session. Remind the group about time parameters. You may choose to have a time of “holy silence” following each story.

Discussion and Q & A - Invite participants to ask questions of the storytellers or to offer comments. Be prepared to ask a question to each participant just in case the group does not raise questions.

Biblical Reflection – Given the content of the storytelling themes, offer a word from scripture that will point your audience to Jesus and the Kingdom of God. You may choose a spiritually reflective co-facilitator to lead in this task.

Prayer – Always end the meeting with a benediction emphasizing “until we meet again.”

Be Guided by the Spirit!

I was not prepared for how emotional it would be as a result of the storytelling. I felt uncomfortable moving from the first story to the second. As I sat looking at the Zoom screen, there were no words. I called the group to a holy silence to honor, respect and remember the people in that story as well as the storyteller herself. This became the practice to honor the transparency and authenticity of participants.

iii. Lead the last S~P~A session

For the last session, repeat the format of Sessions 2 – 5 as necessary. For instance, you may have one participant that still needs to share her story. Ensure that your timeline for the last session leaves enough time to discuss ministry opportunities. The questions that should be raised:

1. What do you hear God saying?
2. Where do you see God at work?
3. What can we do to be the light of Christ?

Listen Well!

On the last meeting, I asked that we come together for a reunion in about 6-months. One participant began to cry and said, "I need this group each Thursday." Other participants affirmed her sentiment. It was suggested that we meet monthly for a check-in. The tears indicated that an emotional bond had taken place over the 6-weeks. And just perhaps, some individual healing was taking place as well.

D. Move Forward

- Follow up with action items
- Make decision on future cohort gatherings if at all

The Call to Act!

As a nurse, we assess our patients' cognition by evaluating their alertness and orientation (to time, place and person). While participating in SPA, I discovered that though I considered myself alert, I was not oriented. I was blindly unaware of the offensive, ugly and often dangerous situations my sisters of color experience in their daily lives. The experience of SPA has allowed me to awaken to the injustices that exist in our culture. That awakening is urging me to move to action. Part of that action is to reach out to other nurses in order to "Act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly..." Micah 6:8 (NIV)

Marilyn Graves

Selected Resources

Print

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson

Stand Your Ground by Kelly Brown Douglas

The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Richard Rothstein

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism by Robin DiAngelo

Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs by David R. Roediger

Films and Film Series

Crash

Fences

Just Mercy

Roots

Rosewood

Same Kind of Different as Me

Selma

The Help



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