Missouri Annual Conference Race and Culture Video Presentation (full)

SLIDE 1: Hi, I'm Naomi Annandale, the Executive Director of Research and Strategic Evaluation at Discipleship Ministries, and today I'm going to share some key points from the Missouri race and culture survey that Discipleship Ministries completed for the Missouri annual conference last fall.

SLIDE 2: The survey addressed several topics, including general support for anti-racism efforts, relational capacity around race related topics, understandings of anti-racism, personal and conference experience with racism, and next steps that the conference might consider in its work against racism.

SLIDE 3: The survey drew a sample of respondents from throughout the conference. We will look at some aspects of that sample.

SLIDE 4: Researchers calculated that about 400 responses were needed to ensure a high level of confidence that the survey represented the conference as a whole. This is a small sample of the approximately 144,000 people who make up the conference. The survey was to be distributed by the annual conference through district office email lists. This method was not perfectly systematic, but it was an acceptable approach in a context in which a complete and accurate email list for everyone in the conference is unavailable.

SLIDE 5: Moreover, although it was not perfectly systematic, the distribution method likely contributed to the large survey population. Ultimately, 2541 people responded to the survey -- more than six times the number sought. Additionally, the survey included demographic questions to allow for data segmentation, allowing researchers to drill down for any specific findings by lay or clergy status, gender, race, age, district and church setting.

SLIDE 6: We sought a response by district that would mirror, as closely as possible, the composition of the conference. This would mean that if one district contained approximately 15% of the population of the annual conference, that district would ideally contribute about 15% of the responses to the survey. We came close to this in several cases, like Gateway Regional, which is about 8% of the annual conference and about seven and a half percent of the survey response. Unfortunately, however, several districts were over-represented and several were under-represented. The most extreme examples are Gateway Central, which includes about 13% of the

annual conference population, but contributed 20% of the survey response, and Northwest, which is about 16% of the annual conference, but contributed only 10% of the survey response. It is impossible to know for sure why the extreme discrepancies occur, but they may represent levels of interest in the topic.

SLIDE 7: As mentioned, the survey included questions that allowed us to know how well certain groups were represented in the data. Ultimately, the sample comes close to the general population trends in The United Methodist Church. Respondents were mostly older, with more than half of responses coming from those ages 65 and above. They were mostly white, with about 84% coming from this group. The second largest racial group was African American, with about eight and a half percent of the survey response. And, more than half were women, which is typical for the church.

SLIDE 8: More details about the survey population serve as an important reminder about the relative homogeneity of the sample, conference and church in general, and should be considered in efforts to eliminate racism. Social research indicates that younger people, people of color and women are more likely to support anti-racism efforts, yet unfortunately, two of those groups are much less likely to be present in the UMC today.

SLIDE 9: The survey began with three fundamental questions addressing respondents' feelings about working to end racism, and one that asked about a connection between anti-racism and discipleship.

SLIDE 10: In general, a strong majority of respondents -- about 85% -- said that as individuals they value work against racism. Looked at more closely, however, we will see distinctions between groups. For example, while 65% of those ages 18 to 34 said this work isvery important to them, only 57% of those 55 and older said so. Similarly, 89% of African Americans said dismantling racism is very important, while only 57% of white respondents agreed.

SLIDE 11: Knowing that people's values and expectations for the church may differ from those they hold for themselves, we also asked about feelings related to conference work against racism. Responses to this question were remarkably similar to those from the previous question, both in the overall results and in discrepancies among respondents of different ages and races. Here again, about 85% of the total response pool said they believe anti-racism work by the conference is important or very important. Additionally, younger people prioritize this more than older and African Americans and

some other people of color more than white respondents.

SLIDE 12: Shifting toward an even more specific focus on the relationship between social and religious commitments, we asked respondents how closely they connected discipleship and dismantling racism. Here again, both the overall sample and the segmented results are similar. It is worth noting that the large percentage of the overall population that made this connection can be a real strength and asset for the conference in its work. This question also included an opportunity to comment, which offered researchers a more detailed view of various perspectives. We saw that despite overall support, there were a significant number of respondents who said the conference should not be involved in what was often referred to as a political issue, or an any public issues at all. But, there also were many who made comments like: "as a Christian, I think it is our mandate to teach the world to love unconditionally." Although there were plenty of disturbing comments from people resistant to the idea that racism is a critical issue to address, they were significantly outnumbered by comments that indicated at least a theoretical commitment to racial justice.

SLIDE 13: Research has shown that meaningful relationships can contribute to racial equity and justice. So we asked respondents how comfortable they were with discussions about certain topics in diverse groups. 2,146 respondents addressed this question.

SLIDE 14: The topics we asked about were race, racism, implicit bias, justice, white supremacy, and white privilege. Race-related topics can be sensitive. Building relationships can help but this is made more difficult by our ideological polarization, geographic and social separation, and well as other factors. Thus, it is a strength that about 92% of respondents said they were comfortableor very comfortable discussing race, about 88% said they were comfortable or very comfortable discussing racism, and about 88% said they were comfortable or very comfortable discussing implicit bias. This represents an opportunity for the conference in its work. Younger, female and non-white respondents were the most comfortable with these topics, and thus are the most likely allies.

SLIDE 15: The concept of justice also was very comfortable to most respondents. But, we can see a real shift when we look at the response to the topics of white privilege and white supremacy. Only 73% of respondents said they are comfortable or very comfortable with talking about white privilege, and nearly 9% said they are very uncomfortable with it. White supremacy is even more difficult to talk about. Almost 12% said they are very uncomfortable discussing white supremacy. Comments often showed

misunderstanding of the concepts, especially of white privilege. Respondents who were uncomfortable with the conference's work against racism were most likely to resist a nuancedunderstanding of white privilege, and often seemed to understand it as synonymous with economic privilege. Additionally, some expressed anger about critical race theory, which has become a target of certain politicians and media, without explaining how they saw it operative in this space.

SLIDE 16: The language of anti-racism has become more common in social discourse over the past several years, so researchers wanted to know how people understand the concept. We asked respondents to define anti-racism. 1614 respondents offered thoughts, most of which directly addressed the topic. Because this was an entirely open-ended question, we needed to collaboratively find and assign themes to each response.

SLIDE 17: What became increasingly clear as we read through all 1614 responses was that for those who support it, antiracism has a very active focus. People used words like work, effort, change, opposing, et cetera. The chart on this slide shows all major themes, with those that are similarly activity-focused highlighted in blue. About 8% of respondents, however, answered this question with resistance, expressing anger or frustration about the prominence of racism as a critical social issue. Many appeared to disbelieve the idea that racism persists in the United States, and saw this work as a waste of time and money. Some used language that was virulent, overtly racist and disturbing.

SLIDE 18: Other themes found in the thoughts on anti-racism include: Equality or equity, which is more of a mindset, often involving a faith commitment to God's equal love for all people; Simplistic, which was an orientation focused on being nice as a way to get along; Spiritualizing, which we use to describe responses that insist that belief in the tenets of the Christian faith would, with little or no associated action, resolve racism; Beyond Skin Color, which often was tied to statements from or about Martin Luther King; Resistance, against, or opposing. These are similar ideas, indicating generally ill feelings toward conference efforts related to racism. Inverse definition, used for comments that actually appeared to define racism, rather than anti-racism. Unsure or NA, applied to comments that indicated the commenter could not define anti-racism. Self-reflective change, addressing internal change that involves questioning one's understandings and unconscious biases, and inclusive, which prioritizes welcoming all people, whether within the church or in other aspects of society.

SLIDE 19: Examples of comments on three significant themes include: For actively working: "Anti-racism is active work within oneself and the

community to dismantle systems of oppression, or equality;" For equality: "Anti-racism is a system or social construct that provides equal access and opportunity to people of all nations and races, or resistance to the idea;" And for resistant/opposing: "Anti-racism is a single edged sword waging an unnecessary cultural war about something which has been pretty much eradicated years ago."

SLIDE 20: Researchers wanted to learn how prevalent racism is in the conference. So we asked two sets of questions related to personal experience with systemic or overt racism, as well as awareness of racism existing in the conference. More than 2000 people responded to one or more of these questions.

SLIDE 21: Asked if they had experienced overt or structural racism. 13% of respondents said yes, 72% said no, and 15% said they were not sure. When respondents are considered as one population, the 13% who have experienced overt or structural racism in the conference may seem small. When considered in raw numbers, however, this feels different. 13% is 263 individuals. Moreover, because this survey is based on a sample, this is a very small fraction of the total conference population.

Slide 22: And when segmented by race, the picture looks very different. 38 and a half percent of African Americans say they have experienced overt or structural systemic racism, and 25% of Asian Americans have. And if we limit the analysis to self-identified people of color, nearly 33% say they themselves have experienced overt or structural systemic racism.

SLIDE 23: While anywhere from 15% to 28% of respondents surveyed experienced racism in interactions with conference infrastructure, such as the equipment process or supervisory behaviors, overt or structural racism seems to happen most often in the local church. Nearly 68% of respondents who had personally experienced racism said this happened in local church interactions. The question about where respondents had experienced racism allowed them to choose as many as they felt applied.

SLIDE 24: The percentage of people who were aware of racism in the conference was higher than those who had personal experience. About 20% said they were aware of racism in the conference, about 60% said they were not aware, and about 20% said they were not sure. Again, this may still seem low. However, the same caveats apply. In absolute numbers, this is about 500 people. The sample represents a small portion of the entire conference. And when the responses are broken down by race, the picture is different.

SLIDE 25: 50% of Black or African Americanrespondents said they are aware of racism in the conference, and 25% of those who are multiracial said so. You may note that the Pacific Islander response is very high, at 66.67%. But the Pacific Islander representation in the survey is extremely low, so that number should be considered with caution. Overall, though, about 43% of people of color said they are aware of overt or systemic racism in the conference.

SLIDE 26: Again, local church interactions were the most common site for experiences of racism, though in this question, the appointment process was cited more often than it was in the previous section. Nearly 65% said they were aware of racism in the local church, and about 35% cited the appointment process as a problem.

SLIDE 27: About one quarter of those who have experienced systemic or overt racism in the conference said their experience didn't quite fit the choices provided.They named a range of issues such as leadership in the conference, lack of movement to stronger churches for pastors of color, and the ordination process. Others provided sharp critiques of power structures, such as the following: "White privilege gives Euro-Americans a permanent seat, and a powerful voice at the table where decisions are made. This is most prevalent at the conference and cabinet level, even at the annual conference when selecting delegates."

SLIDE 28: As examples of personal experience with racism in the conference, the following comments can be attended to. First, describing local interactions, one respondent said "like a man who would greet people at the front door of a church wearing a confederate flag hat. When I asked about the hat, the PPR committee told me that it was my family's problem because we did not respect his heritage." Describing structural issues, one said "People are of color are not likely to get certain appointments because the cabinet believes the congregation would not receive them." There was resistance in comments as well, with some respondents saying things like "I've never seen a single event or heard a single whisper among the Methodist congregations, even hinting at discrimination."

SLIDE 29: To get a picture of the current outlook in the conference, we asked respondents for suggestions of next steps leaders might take in the work against racism, as well as what they thought were the greatest barriers holding the effort back.

SLIDE 30: Respondents' suggestions for next steps focus primarily on three topics. First, education and training, especially opportunities to learn about things like current and historical racism in the United States. Second, relationship building through practices like supporting multi-ethnic churches, and mission partnership between churches. Finally, prophetic leadership, by bringing more people of color into the conference leadership team. It should be emphasized that these are suggestions that may or may not be supported by research, and that Discipleship Ministries is not in a position to endorse any particular strategies.

SLIDE 31: Respondents also were asked to identify the one barrier that they believe presents the greatest danger to the work against racism. The most common choice was denial that racism is a problem. 36% of respondents said that denial is most likely to hold back change. Second, about 26% of respondents said that the view of anti-racism as a political agenda is most problematic. Ultimately, this question frustrated a number of respondents, most likely those most sympathetic to anti-racism work, because they wanted to choose all or many of the options.

SLIDE 32: Respondents were given the opportunity to offer final comments on the survey and the topics it addressed. 667 did so.

SLIDE 33: The predominant themes in these comments included commitment to anti-racism, resistance to the work and concept of anti-racism, and an approach we described as diagnosis/prescription, in which a respondent would briefly name a cause of racism and offer a solution to it. These were generally relatively simple, and often under-expressed the complexity of racism in the present context of 21st century America.

SLIDE 34: Examples of comments included this thought on commitment: "conference efforts must not be a window dressing but must be substantive must have measurable, observable success at a local level." There was this thought in support of caution: "And we should be very careful how we approach this subject. It can easily offend people." And this one in the diagnosis/prescription area: "Prayers for unity and bringing Jesus into any gathering where two or more are gathered in His name."

SLIDE 35: I will share just a few highlights from the executive summary as there is a separate recording that addresses this more extensively.

SLIDE 36: As a reminder: This survey reached more than 2500 people. On the strength of that sample, we can say that there is support for the conference's

work against racism and individual commitment to combat racism, and the support is broad, across all demographic groups. These populations are potential allies in the conference's work against racism.

SLIDE 37: That said, despite general support for working to end racism, some respondents were strongly opposed to these efforts. Some disputed the persistence of racism within the United States. These perspectives represent a challenge for the Missouri annual conference as it seeks to end racism. Two topics -- white privilege and white supremacy -- elicited strong resistance and even anger among respondents. Many comments indicated misunderstandings of white privilege and white supremacy, often invoking critical race theory. This represents a challenge to the conference, as white privilege is one of the most pernicious and yet least understood forces holding back progress in racial justice.

SLIDE 38: Unfortunately, a number of respondents said they themselves had experienced structural or overt racism and/or that they were aware of these experiences in the conference. Additionally, these experiences happen most often in the local church. In general, respondents' final thoughts focused on commitment and strength, and a desire to work against racism in the conference. Overall, the Missouri Annual Conference faces a number of strengths that can be called upon in the work against racism. These include: conviction, connection with discipleship, relationship capacity around some topics and understandings of anti-racism. But there also are challenges, including: misunderstanding of white privilege, resistance to anti-racism work, lack of diversity in the conference, and experiences of racism in the conference. The conference will want to keep these in mind as it plans strategies for its work against racism.

Additionally, an intriguing issue arose as we read the open-ended comments from respondents. Although the survey had no questions related to sexuality, several respondents brought up the issue of LGBTQ challenges in the United Methodist Church and Society. Although the overall number of these were low, they were persistent enough that we thought it important to mention.

SLIDE 39: Finally, the report on the Missouri race and culture survey includes a section of cross tabs in which data has been segmented by age, gender, race and district. These pages address some of the key survey questions, broken down by population groups.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to do this work and to share it with the Missouri annual conference. We wish for you many blessings as you engage in this important work of racial justice.