

Who Should Do Beloved Conversations?

We believe that **Beloved Conversations** is one excellent tool that congregations can use to become racially just communities that are actively working to confront and heal white supremacy within and beyond their walls. If you are a religious institution that is ready to make a commitment to engaging in this long-haul work as a part of lifelong faith development and spiritual practice, Beloved Conversations is for you.

How do we know we're ready for Beloved Conversations?

Beloved Conversations is a unique curriculum because it can offer deep learning and relationship building for people who are both new to and experienced with racial justice work.

- Some signs that Beloved Conversations might be a good fit for your congregation include:
 - You have already had some congregational conversation about race, racism, white supremacy, and racial justice (e.g., a book group, guest speakers, discussion forums, community events).
 - A core of people in leadership (e.g., minister, staff, Board members) agree that racial justice work is an important priority for your congregation.
 - You have a passionate Racial Justice Team that is looking for a way to bring more members of the congregation into their work.
 - You are looking for a racial justice program that simultaneously focuses on both nurturing spirituality/faith formation and building concrete skills for organizational change and action.
- It is probably NOT a good time for you to start if:
 - Your congregation has never had any kind of conversation or programming about racism or white supremacy in the past.
 - Key leadership will not support and/or be involved with Beloved Conversations.
 - Your congregation is in the midst of a major unresolved conflict.

How should we prepare for Beloved Conversations?

- We highly recommend giving yourselves a minimum of two-three months lead time when scheduling your opening retreat,

so you can make sure there's enough time to recruit Facilitators and Participants and arrange all the details. Please also read all the materials you receive as soon as you get them so you can begin making logistical preparations for the program.

- More broadly, congregations have done a variety of things to prepare for Beloved Conversations. These have included hosting book groups about works that focus specifically on race (Ta Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*, the UUMA's *Centering*, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, Patrisse Khan-Cullors' *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*, etc.); inviting local speakers to present on issues of race and racism facing the community you are located in; participating in community forums about race and racism with other local organizations and/or congregations; engaging in the UUA's White Supremacy Teach-In; offering film screenings and facilitated discussions about race and racism (*Race: The Power of an Illusion*, *13th*, *Fruitvale Station*, *The Namesake*, etc.).

Who is the intended audience for Beloved Conversations?

Beloved Conversations is designed for use by both all-white and multi-racial groups. We encourage you to be thoughtful and intentional about the racial composition of each small group.

- **MULTI-RACIAL GROUPS:** Beloved Conversations understands that because of the way racism and white supremacy impact us differently, people of different racial backgrounds have differing spiritual and identity development needs. There is much work that people of color and white people can do together, but some of the work is best done in caucused spaces. Beloved Conversations is written with the needs of both people of color and white people in mind, and includes options for racial

identity-based caucusing at various points throughout the curriculum.

While people of color who are members of predominantly white congregations have a huge amount to gain by participating in the healing work of racial justice, there is always an extra spiritual and emotional cost for people of color who choose to engage in this work in groups that are majority white.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that you do not run a small group with fewer than 4-5 people of color in it. It is fine if all the participants of color from your congregation are in one small group, and the other small group(s) is all white folks. We also recommend that you have frank conversations with people of color who are interested in participating in Beloved Conversations so that they are aware of the kinds of elements the program entails, and you can ensure that they have a competent support system in place should the need arise (e.g., the Minister or another person of color with pastoral care skills within the congregation).

- **ALL-WHITE GROUPS:** White people have a huge amount to learn about race and white supremacy culture, and while multi-racial spaces are important to the learning process, there is a lot that can be gained when white people work together to dismantle white supremacy within ourselves and our institutions. Beloved Conversations, which has been designed by a multi-racial team of curriculum writers, is appropriate for use by all-white groups as a part of the larger long-term project of congregationally-based racial justice work.

What are the next steps after Beloved Conversations?

The steps and actions participants and congregations take after finishing the retreat and eight sessions of Beloved Conversations are as varied as the participants and congregations themselves! The Beloved Conversations curriculum is designed to help you surface possible next steps that are a good fit for your congregation, especially through the work you'll engage in Sessions 6-8. Some possible next steps include:

- Scheduling another round of Beloved Conversations! The curriculum is meant to be done iteratively, year after year, to help the congregation build towards a "tipping point" after which radical change within the system becomes more possible. The tipping point is generally understood to happen when between 15-30% of the congregation has completed the program. Some congregations choose to run it annually; some run it again as they have the resources and participants available.

- Building deeper community partnerships, specifically focusing on justice work over service work. How can your congregation support efforts in your community for racial justice, in solidarity with communities of color who are directly impacted? Think about how to build deep and authentic relationships you can commit to for the long haul.
- Creating ways for folks in your congregation who could not participate in the curriculum this round to experience some of the important learning and skill building. Which pieces of the sessions sparked energy and the desire for further exploration for your small group? Are there ways you could think of to offer a shorter workshop, discussion, or experience related to that for a wider group?
- Designating a regularly scheduled time to talk/read/reflect together about race, racism, and white supremacy. One way to do this is by starting a monthly forum, movie showing, book group, or field trip designed to keep learning about issues of race and racial justice in the forefront of the life of your congregation.
- Lots of other fantastic things... The possibilities are endless!



Is your congregation or faith community ready to learn more about Beloved Conversations or take the next step to sign up?

Please email our Congregational Coordinator at **BelovedConversations@meadville.edu**

to set up a time to talk it through.

We are available to answer all of your questions and help you decide if the program would be a great fit for your congregation!