

1. Did the content of this film come as a surprise to you?

Only one was not surprised by the video content, living in a mixed-race family, they had experience of racism.

They hope this new thing will make a real difference

They are sick of policies and promises

The rest were very surprised to hear it. And had not come across it or noticed it

No but the kind of thing mentioned in the video was not something we had experienced in the URC. The problem seemed to us not so much about overt racism as about attitudes. We were very aware from work experience and other that racism is pretty virulent in some places and situations.

We were none of us surprised, although as the discussion ensued, there were caveats.

One member spoke about the racial mix within her church and felt the problem was overemphasised by the media. We are all God's children.

Another countered that response by pointing out that as white people it was hard to appreciate the problem. We needed to listen and be challenged.

Did not realise there was so much racism, I've never noticed it really...

Not a total shock just because of how everything has been more recently. There has been more information and attention drawn to it. Making you look more often, maybe before I hadn't noticed so much but now we've talking about it more and we are encouraged to not stay quiet and talk about it.

We've been challenged in our church by Iranian Asylum Seekers who have recently joined us. People have been accepting and supportive of them which is great to see. I certainly haven't detected racism towards them.

The content of the video was not a surprise to anyone. One person who had attended a Christian Unity service last Sunday had seen something similar.

Did the content come as a surprise - mainly no's, but a "yes and no... I've always lived in white middle class areas and don't encounter this in our churches".

"Not surprised as trained with Andrew, so heard these stories"

"Not easy to be aware"

2.a) If yes, the content did come as a surprise, how might this film change the way you approach your church setting?

they will be more aware, look for it, share if seen and stamp on it

They talked about positive discrimination and making a positive effort

We are aware of a certain hesitation in "calling out" racism, perhaps especially in a church context.

A major step is recognising the existence of a problem. Part of Christianity is about the recognition that we are not perfect, but fallible human beings.

One church represented is very ethnically diverse and has one young Ghanaian elder. Bring people through into leadership can be a challenge, not necessarily because of racism but because of lifestyle issues.

We shared our different church experiences.

A younger member spoke about older congregations not having so much exposure to black people, or their views.

One person likened the non-acceptance of a black minister to the non-acceptance of a woman or an LGBT person. This was challenged as in those two cases proponents raised (often spurious) biblical reasons for their views. There was no equivalent biblical reasoning behind rejection of black people.

One member reflected on regular ministerial meetings with black Elders and colleagues. The topic of racism had never come up. Whether this was because, as he'd assumed, it didn't present a problem, or whether it was so every day, it went unremarked.

We all thought we weren't racist but were aware either that sub-consciously we were or that others might perceive as us being so (or both). So it was very important that, when we could, we had an open honest dialogue to identify what our perceptions of each other were to identify where we were either right or wrong and to learn from this, accepting that prejudice is mainly, but not exclusively one way. There was concern that failure to have dialogue can mean misconceptions or prejudices can fester and so be exacerbated

I guess it's worrying that [racism] could be there and not coming to the surface...

We talk about it more in society but within our churches we don't really face it, certainly not in my experience.

Only one example was given of seeing racism in church: a member of the church used the 'm' word in front of her child, who has not returned to church as she was so shocked.

There was a view that racism is not only prevalent in church but is society wide. So church tends to reflect what is happening in society. But we need to lead society by our example.

Have to be mindful and speak up when people say negative things (ie. about immigrants)

Examples witnessed - "East End of London. Rites of passage ie. anniversary service a year after a death, not understood "not our tradition". Had to change the views of the Elders"

"All white study group - a lot of people have no reference to injustice in the everyday so experiences are challenging to be understood"

2.b) If no, the information does not come as a surprise, what are the examples of discrimination you've witnessed in your setting?

Structures and affirmative action. Isn't placing people about finding the right person for the job/task, discerning calling and gifting etc. The view was expressed that race should not be a consideration.

We all agreed that we needed to make a safe space for conversations with black people in our churches.

We felt it would be useful for the film to be shown in services in a lot of churches, especially those whose congregations are predominantly or entirely white, but wonder if it would be.

We have got to be ready to learn from others - the joy of an African congregation meeting in one of our churches was highlighted as an example

One minister had wanted to share the video with her church congregation and had edited it and shown it because she wanted to bring it to their attention.

One group member had been at Mission Council then Assembly executive so it was not the first they had heard of it. They reflected that there were similar problems in many congregations and this was not something URC specific.

Another member had heard comments about preachers accents and criticism of someone with a lisp. Comments were made by several members that some were not overtly racist but we all needed to watch our language because inadvertent comments cause problems too.

In answer another shared a good news story about someone who had made comments about not attending services when a minister was preaching but changed their attitude due to getting to know the pastoral care the minister had offered them. So hope and change is possible

One person shared that they felt the video was a bit chaotic, airing a whole variety of concerns, all valid, but leaving viewers with no clear action plan. However they recognised that this was due to the hurt, confusion and rejection many were suffering.

I shared a comment from Peter Pay some years ago that if only one person of colour is on any committee their position is just as difficult as they feel alone. However if nominations can work to having several people on a committee, or on the platform at General Assembly, then that would be an encouragement. And an awareness from ourselves as white people about the daily "othering" of our colleagues and friends is helpful.

Much of this shared is a lived experience – not a surprise. But I am hopeful because we cannot continue doing the same thing and expecting different results.

It's not something we have discussed at our church. It certainly would come as a surprise to lots of people at Church. I'll be honest, I haven't realised how bad racism is, it's not something I think about. But the video is very much food for thought.

Calling out racism, confronting it when you hear it. (Overt comments)

It's hard to know how to respond/challenge those when it's subtle/under the radar.

We've had a black minister at our church before, we are a mainly white community. I've not heard anything said negatively. Doesn't really matter about the colour of the skin, some people are born with racial prejudice.

I'd love the church to encourage unity not uniformity. There's a difference between the two.

Recognising culture differences and celebrating them as well. Celebrating them is important!

The gulf between how "I" behave and how another person receives or see that behaviour.

"We" are not racist but we cannot tell how others experience us or see our behaviour.

How do people who are not white feel when they come to church and they are the only non-white person.

The use of the words "white" and "black" with all the cultural assumptions about those words.

Is racism only about colour? It can also be about religion and our assumptions.

Experiences of racism between different minority groups – one group to another.

Institutional racism – while we speak of individual experiences there are also systems, cultures etc that favour white people.

How do our structures favour people who are white? For the most part it is a passive partiality.

How do we combat these structures/ cultures that allow bias?

Culture – how the culture round here is perceived by those who are not part of it. Our way of doing things is seen to be a white way and therefore unhelpful.

Acknowledge the difficulties when you are an all-white church which reflects the area, and , quite, frankly, more white people aren't coming so we're overall not always an attractive proposition anyway.

One or two churches have good mixed congregations.

How do we listen if we have no one listen to?

many of our 'white' communities often have hidden colours.

Some black churches becoming more visible in previous all-white areas. e.g. I.O.W.

Congregation don't see the point of learning if they have no black members anyway.

There is a real difficulty with accents, it's not just a prejudice thing - same applies to hospital staff. Often for older members with failing hearing it is a real challenge and they have the same problem with Scottish accents for example.

We need to learn culturally.

What can we do??????

The video was not actually very helpful, other than the younger person who gave solid examples of overall prejudice. It said 'it's here', 'it's deep-rooted', 'it's in our churches' - but unless you are in a church where you can actively listen and learn what would help, it didn't give any ideas for how to go about remedying the situation.

It was said that there is bias shown not only to people of colour but also to situations outside our everyday experience. The Ukrainian conflict has shown us some other problems e.g. there are names we are unfamiliar with and cannot pronounce from many different cultures. An anecdote about some refugees from Ukraine who have suggested they don't expect their hosts to be able to pronounce a name as they would in Russia or Ukraine and have suggested a diminutive to help.

A concern was expressed that we don't recognise the negative signals mentioned in the video and 'the subtle ways' prejudice is manifest that Reverend Wilbert alluded to. As a denomination we should identify what this is and look at training for everyone; we also have to recognise we need to address how we represent Jesus in images & church service materials.

"How do we take this into an all-white context church"

Feedback - Racial equity team for Presbyterian church USA are impressed with the video

We need to keep having this conversation - because black people do live in these "white middle class areas", or may move to these areas, or may get a job in these areas - and we don't want to be treated like an alien nor be ignored