



*Sacred Conversation on Race*  
**The journey continues**

**O God, we pray for your presence and wisdom, as we begin to look carefully at the realities of **RACE and Women's Issues.** Amen.**

**Rac[ism] and sex[ism] interlock in economic, healthcare, and security disparities**

**Women of color are twice as likely as White women to be employed in low-wage jobs**

The intersections of race and women's issues are numerous. Below are some areas of daily realities.

**Political Leadership**



The recent election resulted in an all-time high of 20 women senators in the U.S. Congress. However, in this "Year of the Woman," such new statistics actually reveals a racial bias in women's access to power.

The total absence of Black, Native American, and Latina women, except for Mazie Hirono, a Japanese American from Hawaii, underlines the predominant White cultural norms in women's leadership.

Race and gender oppressions interlock with economic, security and healthcare disparities. Women of color are crucial in representing how the related policy issues should proceed in one of the houses of Congress.

**Job Segregation**

Before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, employers could legally hire, promote, and include, based on race and/or gender.

The racial legacy of these practices persists today. Women of color make up 33% of the female workforce, but they are twice as likely as white women to be employed in hazardous and low wage service sector jobs.



For example, the majority of the poultry plants in the U.S. are located in the South. In 1991, a poultry plant in Hamlet, NC caught fire and 25 people died. Two thirds of the workers at that plant were Black women.

**Wage Gap**

In 2011, the statistics of the average hourly wage of high school educated workers by gender and

race/ethnicity translate into the following scenario. For the same educational attainment, every dollar White men earned in 2011, it compared to women's earnings as follows:

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
White	\$ 1.00	\$ 0.76
Black	\$ 0.77	\$ 0.67
Latino	\$ 0.81	\$ 0.68
Asian	\$ 0.86	\$ 0.69

Racial inequity as seen in the wage gap above remains, even though the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act (2009) provides greater ability to combat wage discrimination based on sex under federal law.

**Health Disparities**

The prevalence of disease progression, high mortality rates and unplanned pregnancies among women of color are some indicators of racial disparities.

For example, Latina women experience unplanned pregnancies at double and Black women at three times the rate of White women.

For women of all races, particularly those who rely on Medicaid health care

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coverage, the Hyde Amendment continues to limit their reproductive choices.



Hopefully, the Affordable Care Act (2009) will expand access to preventative healthcare for an estimated 5.5 million African Americans, 6.1 million Latinos,

2.7 million Asians and 300,00 Native Americans.

In violence against women of all races and classes, the intersection with racism is alarming. The Indian Law Resource Center reported that “Native women are more than twice as likely to be assaulted. . . as any other category of American women.”

Moreover, 86% of Native American reported sexual violence were “attacks by non-Native men,” according

to the Department of Justice. The non-Native perpetrators were able to escape tribal jurisdiction by simply leaving tribal lands.

The renewal of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 2013, for the first time, permits tribal jurisdiction over non-Native perpetrators of violence against Native women living on tribal lands. It also expands the much-needed federal programs and protections for gay and bisexual victims of domestic abuse.

### Prayerful reflection

For those who may be familiar with the story of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz, the happy endings of the book often dominate our memory.

However, if we read closely the experience of Ruth, we find the story of one whose body and labor are being marginalized because she is a woman, a widow with no son, and a minority.

Ruth was “taken” from her Moabite home (1:4, same verb as “abduct” in Judges 21:23), to become a daughter-in-law in an Israelite family, (see “Ruth” in *The*

*Peoples’ Companion to the Bible*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

Ruth would be despised as a foreigner in Naomi’s native land (Deut. 23:3-6). Her stranger status was worsened by the fact that she had no son, and hence was of no use to her mother-in-law (1:11-14). But Ruth migrated not only for her survival as a widow, she remained with Naomi out of solidarity (1:16-17).

A poor foreign widow would be triply vulnerable in the open fields of Bethlehem,

but Ruth was determined to work by gleaning (2:2, 6-7).

But not every “minority” woman would be protected and favored, as Ruth was by Boaz (2:5, 8-9, 14-16), and earned enough food for her family (2:17-18).

Perhaps, by resisting to see Ruth as a “model minority” in Jesus’ genealogy (Mt. 1), our eyes will be opened wide to face the realities of race and women’s issue in the contemporary society.

### Questions for Discussion

1. MUSE: Reflect on your own experiences of “Ruths and Naomis” in your life past or present — who have been caught in the cycle of limited employment opportunities, wage gap, and health disparities.

2. CONNECT: Make connections to the broader experi-

ence of women in your community. Who are those that have been hit at the intersection of racism and sexism?

3. ACT: What letter writing or prayerful church action has in the past addressed these issues in your faith community? What might

you as church be called to do as a next step for study, speakers, action? Perhaps even linking up with inter-faith or ecumenical partners in your town or region?

