

**George Hrbek:**  
***Discussion Questions for White Antiracists***

**Note:** The following prompts are based on the reading of *George Hrbek: The Selma Minister Who Built a White Antiracist Spiritual Community in Chicago*. Exploring them will have the most impact if members of White antiracist communities journal about the prompts, and then discuss them in the communities they organize with.

**Childhood:** *How would you describe the earliest foundations for George's life as an antiracist? Are there lessons for how parents can raise antiracist children? What were your earliest antiracist foundations?*

**Journey to the South:** While still in high school, George's father took him on a long road trip to Birmingham, and intentionally introduced his son to economic and racial disparities along the way. *What was the impact of directly witnessing these inequities in George's antiracist development? What is your own history of witnessing racial or class inequity, and how has that witnessing – or lack of witnessing – impacted you?*

**Pushing Back on Racist Historical Narratives:** George was kicked out of classes in high school for pushing back on racist historical narratives. *How have you pushed back on such narratives? Are there ways that you could further challenge such narratives?*

**Tapping Into a Justice-Oriented Spiritual Legacy:** In seminary, George was drawn to the work of the anti-Nazi theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *What has been the significance of having justice-oriented spiritual teachings in your own life? What are teachings that you aspire to, as part of deepening your antiracist practice? What support do you need in pursuing such aspirations?*

**Not Making Waves/Getting off the Fence:** George established himself as a community leader in Selma partly by not making too many waves... but eventually a time came to "get off the fence." *Have there ever been moments in your life when it felt that not making waves was in the interest of a larger cause? Or: have there been times when you were playing it TOO safe, and perhaps not speaking up about racial justice issues when you should have been?*

**Landing in Community:** When George took a stronger stand for racial justice, he faced repercussions... but he had strong enough support systems to keep going. *Have you ever faced repercussions for taking stands for racial justice? What's your own history with being/not being supported in such moments? How do we build supportive communities that allow people to take stronger stands?*

**Take a Stand... Find Your People:** When George took a stronger stand for racial justice, it also allowed OTHER sympathetic White people to notice him and reach out

to him. *Are there examples in your life of White people who, by taking a stand, have helped to inspire you? Have you ever been that example for others?*

**Holy Naiveté:** In Selma, George directly confronted militant White Supremacists in what he calls a “holy naiveté.” *How can we best challenge today’s White Supremacist militants? How can we best discern when to engage in dialog, and when not to? What is the line between naiveté... and courage?*

**Creating a welcoming, reflective space for meaningful connection:** In Oklahoma, George built a congregation that was welcoming, connected to the community, and encouraged people to share what was truly on their hearts and minds. *How do we build such spaces in our own racial justice communities?*

**“We took our directions from them”:** George worked with migrant farmers by getting to know their priorities rather than acting on what he *assumed* were their priorities. He then collaborated on those priorities according to the wishes of the migrants. This practice built trust and gave George legitimacy. *Have you worked directly with communities that are most impacted by racial inequities? Are there ways that you could improve your practice of taking leadership from those who are most impacted? What are your own experiences with building trust with those communities?*

**Developing a Deeper Understanding of Racism:** Until his time in Oklahoma, George thought of racism as primarily a matter of personal prejudice. Working with migrant farmers and Vietnam veterans helped him develop a deeper analysis. *How has your own understanding of racism evolved over time? What has supported the deepening of that understanding? George came to view his previous understanding of racism as mostly about “personal prejudice” to be severely limiting, and pointing towards dead-end solutions. What are your own thoughts about this?*

**The Mansion Intensives:** The antiracist intensives held at the Mansion brought together many elements... from experiential learning, to study and self-reflection, to eating and singing and worshipping together. *What might such intensives look like today? What is the importance – in terms of antiracist community building – of singing, eating, and potentially sharing spiritual experiences together? Of sharing extended periods of time together? How do we create such opportunities, given the necessities and pressures of life, especially for poor and working-class antiracists?*

**The Power of Witnessing and Listening:** The Mansion intensives also included volunteering in Black freedom struggle spaces, and meeting with Black and Brown grassroots leaders in their own communities. *What is the importance of such direct experiences with people of color fighting for racial justice, in terms of White antiracist growth? How can such connections be built in a way that doesn’t create yet further work and emotional labor for Black and Brown organizers, but that instead truly supports their efforts?*

**Pulling Babies From The River:** *In what way has this story shown up in your own life? What has been your own evolution, in terms of moving from “pulling babies from the river” to “dismantling the catapult?” If you work with organizations that are “pulling babies from the river,” how can you help them shift towards “dismantling the catapult?”*

**White Artists for Racial Justice:** The Mansion included a theatre and a newspaper, and music was an important part of the community. *What is the role of art today in strengthening White antiracist efforts and communities? How can antiracist communities support people doing the often unpaid labor of cultural work?*

**“My quest was to get to know Jesus”:** From Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Black freedom struggle mystics like Howard Thurman, many Christians concerned with racial justice have framed their quest as getting to know Jesus and following in his footsteps. *What is the role of contemporary Christian communities – and other spiritual and religious communities – in the struggle for racial justice? How do we bring predominantly White religious communities into deeper levels of understanding and commitment to racial justice?*

**Waking up to Racism:** Many of the White people coming to the Mansion were waking up to racism for the first time, and were wrestling with a range of difficult emotions. The Mansion was a place that honored that inner struggle and created space for it to be earnestly engaged with. *How can White antiracist communities today best support White people in sitting with – and working through – the emotions and reactions that arise as they face the reality of White supremacy and systemic racism? What is your own history of working through such feelings?*

**Leveraging White Networks for Black Freedom:** George leveraged his connections with White churches and institutions to support local Black Freedom Struggle leaders and actions. This is especially clear in the ways he worked with Fred Hampton, and how he connected Fred directly to his church network. *What networks do you have, and what institutions do you engage with, that you could leverage to elevate and support local Black and Brown racial justice leadership? How can you best leverage those connections for racial justice causes?*

**Consulting With Those Most Impacted:** When Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry was working on issues of homelessness, incarceration, disability rights, or other issues, they consulted with and hired those most impacted. *What is your understanding of why this practice is important? Are there ways to implement or strengthen this practice in efforts you are engaged in?*

**Using Art to Support Marginalized Youth:** The theatre program initiated by George supported Black, Brown, and poor White youth in building community, pursuing their interests, and developing knowledge and skills. *What need is there in your community for such programs? What programs already exist in your community*

*that support marginalized young people to engage in their communities in empowering ways? How might you support such efforts?*

**Mobilizing Church Networks for Racial Justice:** Through the New Wine Exchange, George worked with religious leaders from around the country to discover new ways to help churches adapt to meet the social justice needs of the time. *How might spiritual and religious networks be leveraged for such work today, especially in regards to mobilizing congregations to fight systemic racism? What examples of this kind of work are you aware of?*

**“What builds strong community?”** The story closes with George saying that nothing is more important for antiracist work than community. *What parts of George’s closing quote most resonate with you? What are some of the ways that you could imagine developing stronger antiracist community?*