



# Black History Month

OCTOBER

## A feast for harvest

***“Those who wept as they sowed their seed, gather the harvest with joy.”***

### Psalm 126

Black History Month has been celebrated in Britain every October for nearly 20 years, growing from strength to strength. It highlights and celebrates the achievements of black communities and uncovers their hidden history.

A study into black history by American academic Dr Carter G. Woodson not only turned into a month of events and celebration but also sparked an important international debate. It opened the eyes of black people to their own rich cultural heritage, which was often not represented in mainstream publications or in history lessons that had been taught in schools for generations.

As well as being widely taken up by schools and local authorities, Black History Month provides a great opportunity for churches to emphasise the history and contribution of their own black members and to explore the themes of racial justice.

Photos of food: yomi yomi

## MENU

### Appetisers

#### Ways of marking Black History Month

- Encourage your local libraries and community centres to hold exhibitions and other events for Black History Month – suggestions from the public have an impact!
- Special service using black music
- Get black members of congregation to teach a song to the congregation and talk about what it means.
- Do some African drumming?

#### Drums in Africa

Drums are used as sacred instruments in Africa and a great deal of importance is attached to them. They are used in healing ceremonies, in rites of passage, in naming ceremonies, in warrior rituals, on social occasions like engagement parties and weddings, on harvest parties and celebration of seasons like rain after a period of drought. Drums are also used as a tool for communication, for example in Uganda, you can hear different drum calls in the villages. The common drum calls are, a call to community work normally heard in the mornings, an emergency call, sounded if anyone was in danger and needed help and the *call to worship* which is sounded mainly on Sunday mornings (instead of bells).

Because of the importance of the drum in daily life, the Baganda are called children of the drum. The drum among the Baganda is also a symbol of authority and whenever a new king is installed he is given a drum.

## Main courses

### Bible connections and theological themes

The remembrance of black history contains much sorrow. The promise in Psalm 126 is that this will eventually be turned to joy. The joy is only seen in its true beauty when the sorrow is embraced. What remembrance, repentance and action will be required – personally, locally, nationally and internationally - for this promise to be realised?

#### Hebrews 11

Faith itself has a history: it has been handed down to us by parents, teachers, artists, role models and companions. Black communities around the world and in the church exist because of (or in spite of) their history. Just as the Bible constantly remembers the antecedents of faith through genealogies and narratives, so it is important for congregations to remember the events and episodes that have shaped the faith of its black members and for all people to remember God's hand in what has made them who they are. Let Black History Month become an opportunity for creative reflection on our formative experiences, in sorrow and in joy.

Black people are far more prominent in the Bible than has traditionally been recognised or acknowledged. There is now a mountain of Christian literature on the black presence in scripture: why not explore some of it on the Sundays during October? Remember that for some people (including some black Christians!) the stereotypical impression of Jesus is of a man with blonde hair and blue eyes, and therefore a white skin. Everyone in the congregation benefits if such a false picture is challenged and replaced with a more realistic and more inclusive image.

#### 1 Kings 10:1-13 - The Queen of Sheba honouring Solomon

The writers of 1 Kings wanted to emphasise the wealth and wisdom of Solomon. One way of doing this is to depict high-status visitors. As you read this passage, ask yourself not so much what it says about Solomon, but what it says about this African queen. How does this contradict any stereotypical images of Africa? What more modern black characters can you think of whose presence and blessing might enhance the reputation of an organization, church, campaign or leader?

#### Deuteronomy 26:1-11

The Jewish people recognize the importance of keeping their history alive. By recalling formative experiences the community regularly reminds itself of its essential identity and is therefore better able to cope with the demands of the present, whatever they may be. "My ancestor was a wandering Aramean." Explore how the origins and ancestry of your congregation could be described and how this history affects its corporate identity. (This would work as either a personal or a corporate exercise.)

## Theology in Black and White

An exercise for home groups

**Aim:** *to understand that there are different ways of experiencing and describing what God has done and is doing for his people.*

Think about the Christian concept of justice.

Read Deuteronomy 24:14-22

- What different resonances are there for black and white members of your group?
- What do these instructions about justice conjure up in terms of our experience/history?
- What stories can we tell about how far justice is found in our communities, and about how far there is still to go?
- How can we understand *together* God's justice for all people?

## Questions for discussion

If you feel able to, share with the group an example of when you have found it helpful or necessary to remember or claim an aspect of your personal history in order to move forward.

How do past events continue to impact the present? Think of examples from different parts of Britain and Ireland and from other countries. What role can Christians/Churches play in healing the negative and destructive effects of history?

To stand against racism, how necessary is it to have family or close friends from different ethnic groups?

## Deserts

### Intercessions and petitions

For those who require 'healing of the memories' in order to overcome an aspect of their own history.

For 'forgotten victims' of history whose stories are rarely heard (for example aborigines in Australia who were taken from their families as children).

For those who imagine themselves to be poor, not realising their own wealth.

## **Chef's specials**

### **Challenges for response by the congregation**

Get to know a local congregation whose ethnic mix is different from your own. Visit each other's places of worship and look both for common ground and for differences.

### **Ideas for young people**

Martin Luther King famously had a dream about how the America of the 1960s needed to change – what are our dreams for how our community must change?

### **Ideas for community action**

Make contact with a local Black Majority Church and arrange a joint service/ meal/ bible study? (see [http://www.bmcdirectory.co.uk/church\\_list.php](http://www.bmcdirectory.co.uk/church_list.php) for a list of churches)

Hold a 'Black Art' concert – invite local Minority Ethnic community groups (such as dance groups and music groups).

Join in with some of the things that are happening in your area. Check out:  
<http://www.blackhistorymonthuk.co.uk/listings/home.html>

For general Black History Month material, prepared from a church perspective, you might like to look at:

[http://www.urc.org.uk/reform\\_magazine/articles/bhm\\_palestine/bhm/bhm\\_index.htm](http://www.urc.org.uk/reform_magazine/articles/bhm_palestine/bhm/bhm_index.htm)

### **Suggestions of fundraising events**

Hold an African market - food and other African goods for sale.