

Resolution to Providence Presbytery A Call to Action in Dismantling Structural Racism

Prepared and approved by the
Committee for Racial and Religious Reconciliation
and the Mission & Outreach Ministry Team

- 1) WHEREAS racism against people of color, although antithetical to the values of our democracy, is heartbreakingly woven into the fabric of our nation.
- 2) WHEREAS while racism has victimized all people of color, racism against Black people is uniquely horrific --- it has a 400-year history in the United States, including slavery, segregation, unjust laws, redlining, police brutality --- and it is continued violence against Black people that has been center-stage in recent years.
- 3) WHEREAS the Bible has unjustly been used to justify discrimination, prejudice, and abusive behavior toward Black people, Indigenous peoples, and other people of color.
- 4) WHEREAS Genesis 1.27 indicates that all of humanity is made in the image of God, and that only in true diversity can humanity find the full image of God in our midst.ⁱ
- 5) WHEREAS 1 Corinthians 12.26 reminds us that when one member of the body suffers, as our siblings in Christ who are people of color suffer today, the whole body suffers with them.ⁱⁱ
- 6) WHEREAS Ephesians 2.14 declares that Christ has broken down every dividing wall between groups, and yet humanity continues to cling to this wall.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 7) WHEREAS Part I of the Constitution of the PCUSA, the *Book of Confessions*, includes the Declaration of Barmen, which states, “Precisely because we want to be and to remain faithful to our various Confessions, we may not keep silent, since we believe that we have been given a common message to utter in a time of common need and temptation.”^{iv}
- 8) WHEREAS the *Book of Confessions* also includes the Brief Statement of Faith, which states, “the Spirit gives us courage...to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.”^v
- 9) WHEREAS the *Book of Confessions* also includes the Confession of Belhar, which, having been written to reject systems of apartheid in South Africa, states, “Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.”^{vi}
- 10) WHEREAS Part II of the Constitution of the PCUSA, the *Book of Order*, includes in the “Great Ends of the Church,” that the church is called to, “the promotion of social righteousness and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven in the world.”^{vii}

- 11) WHEREAS the *Book of Order* also states, “The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church’s membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person.”^{viii}
- 12) WHEREAS in 2016, the PCUSA put forth a national initiative to fight racism in our denomination, creating “Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community,” which says: “Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others. It is also a lie about God, for it falsely claims that God favors parts of creation over the entirety of creation. Because of our biblical understanding of who God is and what God intends for humanity, the PC(USA) must stand against, speak against and work against racism. Anti-racist effort is not optional for Christians. It is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship, without which we fail to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.”^{ix}
- 13) WHEREAS Structural racism is not only the “opposite of what God intends for humanity,” but is also an example of how sin is systemic rather than simply personal. As “Facing Racism” states, “Reformed theology offers a nuanced understanding of sin. Calvin did not understand sin to be simply an individual belief, action, or moral failing (Calvin, 1960). Rather, he viewed sin as the corporate state of all humanity. It is an infection that taints each of us and all of us. No part of us — not our perception, intelligence, nor conscience — is unclouded by sin.”^x
- 14) WHEREAS The mission of Providence Presbytery states, “guided by the Holy Spirit, congregations will be Supported, Equipped and Connected to serve Jesus in a changing world.”

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Providence Presbytery...

- 1) Acknowledges that we are incapable of living into our mission and calling as a Presbytery without addressing the history of structural racism in our church, community and country, without condemning violence against people of color, without speaking out against the unjust, inhumane, and tragic loss of lives of Black people, and without taking steps to recognize the privilege of White people in society and to engage in the work of eliminating structural racism and racist acts against people of color.
- 2) Declares racism a sin and condemns both the historical and current mistreatment, abuse, and murder of people of color in our communities and in our nation. In so doing, Providence Presbytery commits to identifying and undertaking the spiritual work

required to dismantle racism in ourselves, communities, and nation. This commitment includes confession, repentance, humility, and courage. All of this is possible only through the power of Christ, who has already conquered sin, and who, as the Confession of Belhar reminds us, has called us to “earnestly pursue” the unity God has designed for us.^{xi}

- 3) Invests in opportunities for learning, growing, and transforming for members of our presbytery, members of our congregations, and our churches themselves, including but not limited to:
 - a. A Presbytery-wide 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge^{xii}.
 - b. Book studies and studies of other media (movies, articles, etc.).
 - c. An examination of the history of Providence Presbytery and its complicity with racism, and a call to reparations.
 - d. An examination of Providence Presbytery’s current complicity with racism and a call for reconciliation.
 - e. Events, speakers, and discussions for multi-generational audiences sponsored by the Presbytery to foster conversation about specific topics within racial justice.
 - f. Investment in antiracism training opportunities (perhaps in conjunction with other presbyteries) and promoting participation throughout the Presbytery.
 - g. Required antiracism training for all ordained pastors and paid staff, to be renewed every three years.
- 4) Provides time on the docket at Presbytery meetings to promote dialogue, education and resources to deepen trust and understanding between White people and Black people.
- 5) Assesses and increases the number of entities owned by Black people with whom the Presbytery does business. Evaluate business relationships and develop and implement a rubric for determining if termination is warranted.
- 6) Encourages congregations to take action in dismantling racism by:
 - a. Reading and studying “Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community” as produced by the PCUSA and approved by General Assembly 222 (2016)
 - b. Studying and incorporating into worship and church life the Declaration of Barmen and the Confession of Belhar, both found in the *Book of Confessions*.
 - c. Taking the pledge to join the “Matthew 25” initiative within the PCUSA which includes dismantling structural racism as one of its tenets.^{xiii}

Resources

Book of Confessions (PCUSA), Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 2016.

Book of Order 2019-2021 (PCUSA), Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 2019.

“Matthew 25 Initiative,” Presbyterian Mission Agency,
www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25.

“Facing Racism: A Vision of Intercultural Community (Churchwide Anti-Racism Policy),”
Presbyterian Mission Agency, 5-21-2016,
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/facing-racism-vision-intercultural-community-antiracism-study-guides/>.

Racial Equity Tools Glossary, MP Associates, Center for Assessment and Policy Development and
World Trust Educational Services, 2019. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

ⁱ Genesis 1.27 (NRSV): “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female, he created them.”

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 12.26a (NRSV): “If one member [of the body] suffers, all suffer with it.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Ephesians 2.14 (NRSV): “For he [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one, and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us.”

^{iv} *Book of Confessions* 8.08.

^v *Book of Confessions* 11.4.

^{vii} *Book of Order* F-1.0304

^{viii} *Book of Order* F-1.0403

^{ix} “Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community” Churchwide Anti-Racism Policy, **as approved by GA 222 (2016)**

^x “Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community” Churchwide Anti-Racism Policy, **as approved by GA 222 (2016)**

^{xi} *Book of Confessions* 10.3, “Confession of Belhar,” “We believe that Christ’s work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another; that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain; that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.”

^{xii} **More information available...**

^{xiii} For more information on the Matthew 25 Initiative, please visit: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/>.