

“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS ...”

ADDRESSING RACISM AND THE CHURCH

A

CONFESSION

AND

CALL TO ACTION

IN THE PRESBYTERY OF REDSTONE

PRESBYTERY OF REDSTONE COUNCIL

August 25, 2020

“In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations.”

(“The Confession of 1967,” Part II, “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” Section, A, “The Mission of the Church,” Paragraph 4, “Reconciliation in Society.” In Book of Confessions)

“God’s redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces the whole of man’s life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific and technological, individual and corporate...It is the will of God that his purpose for human life shall be fulfilled under the rule of Christ and all evil shall be banished from his creation.

With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In the steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.”

(“The Confession of 1967”, Part III, “The Fulfillment of Reconciliation”, 9.54, 9.55 in The Book of Confessions)

CONFESSION

When one part of the body suffers, we all feel it.

For all those who suffer injustices because of the color of their skin

We say their names...

For those who died unnecessarily and for those who endure indignities

We say their names...

For those whose pain we have failed to see and the lament we did not hear

We say their names....

For when one part of the body suffers, we all feel it.

We join our voices with our siblings of color to amplify as one the cry against injustices

We confess our own sin of racism, whether deliberate or unintentional, conscious or unconscious

We sin both against God and against neighbor who we treat as "other"

We dehumanize those who are God's image and in so doing degrade ourselves as well

We fail to acknowledge in word and deed that the lives of our Black siblings do matter...

They must matter to us, they must matter in our society because, most of all, they matter to God.

We confess our own sins of commission...

when we participate in acts of bias and where we protect the benefits of advantage based upon race.

We confess our sins of omission...

when we fail to cry out against injustice, neglect to resist evil and ignore the demands of discipleship

As communities of faith, we have not always visibly demonstrated God's rule on earth as it is in heaven...

Our words and actions or lack of them have not followed the One,

who inaugurated a reign from above which is a kingdom of every nation, race and tribe..

By God's grace, we are called to take up our cross and follow him...

Through personal engagement and institutional participation, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, praying and acting that our God will transform us and this world in love and justice.

We call upon our pastors, our congregations, and all those who follow Jesus, whether in our sanctuaries or in our neighborhoods, in our prayer groups or in our policies, in our gatherings or in our government, to name those who suffer among us

to learn from those who experience injustice based upon race

to risk giving up power and all those things we take for granted

to engage the differences among us that make up this God-imagined humanity

to speak words of challenge to the powers and authorities

PRAY IT NOW...THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.....

PROCLAIM IT NOW... THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN....

ENACT IT NOW.... THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN....

EXPECT IT NOW.....THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

CONTEXT

“In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations.”

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We have seen firsthand what we have failed to notice and acknowledge before. We have witnessed the tragic suffering and death of people of color through abuse of power and authority. No longer can we turn away. No longer can we rationalize that it is merely the bad actions of some exceptional few. The problem of racism, as evidenced in the excessive use of force by those in whom we have called to protect and serve, is only one expression of this sin in our society.

The Presbytery of Redstone seeks to follow Jesus in the participation of the mission of God’s reign where love and justice are the norm. Faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ requires our response -- our action. In our personal relationships, congregational ministries or for the common good, we oppose racism in all its forms as inherently antithetical to our God and to the image of God found in all humanity. We stand in solidarity with our siblings who are people of color suffering violence at the hands (knees) of those who act on our behalf. We join with our siblings in amplifying our voices to resist practices and policies, structures and institutions that have deliberately targeted or unconsciously demeaned people based upon race. By God’s grace, in following Jesus, we offer ourselves in humble service to learn from others, to aspire to speak in the name of our God and to act faithfully so that the good news in all its fullness may be made known, in peace and in justice.

As the pinnacle of God’s good creation, human beings were formed as the very image of God. All of humanity bears that image regardless of race, gender, or other distinctions. As God’s image, we were given the responsibility to love God exhibited specifically in our care for each other and for the earth. Intended to develop the world for God’s glory and honor, cultures, institutions, and societal structures were and are expected to love and serve God and neighbor. While we fully affirm the universal nature of God’s image in the human family, we also value any differences resulting from culture, race, and nationality. Our God is the God of all races, all nations, all peoples; no single group, faction, or country owns this God. God’s people come from every tribe, race, and nation.

Yet, we know our story reflects our fallen nature and our rebellion against God. This fracture is found not just in our relationship with God but marks all the relationships we have and all the structures and institutions we build. Our relationships with each other are broken, characterized by our own misuse of power in practices and policies. Our institutions have been developed and maintained to serve only ourselves and our own preferred groups. The sin that separates us from our God also separates us one from another. Within our own history, such brokenness has often been organized around and based on race. Even in our own day, we carry the effects of such differentiation based upon race in intrinsic connections to status and power.

Thanks be to God, that we have not been left to our sin. By God’s grace, in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, we have been called to love and serve both God and neighbor. By the Word and the Spirit, the power of sin and death with all its expressions in brokenness and injustice is and will be conquered. The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ, God’s grace-filled promise draws us into covenantal fellowship with God and into God’s multi-ethnic family where barriers are broken down. Through this promise, God’s people are called and have been entrusted with the agency of this reconciliation to God and to one another. As communities of

faith, hope, love, and witness, we are called to demonstrate in word and deed that God's reign has come and is coming. These expressions of both personal and public transformation include our relationships with each other, nurture of faithful discipleship, and advocacy within and for the public good.

Therefore, in this time and place, we bear the responsibility to act faithfully as individuals, as congregations and as a presbytery. May we be renewed in our highest calling to love the Lord our God with our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. And, may the Spirit of God empower us beyond just feeling remorseful or merely invoking symbolic statements of unity. May we seek the hard and faithful work of hearing the cries of those for whom justice is denied, acting then upon our confidence in God's transforming power to redeem and restore that which has been corrupted and lost. May we seek, with humility, to act in ways that follow the paths of redemption and restoration, no matter what it may cost us or how our own lives might need to be restructured. May we embody and enact for the world the signs of God's new creation that has and is coming. May we pray and act, proclaim and call for God's will of mercy, love and justice be done on earth as it is in heaven.

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CALL TO ACTION (Within the Presbytery)

- **Commit the Presbytery portion of Peace and Global Witness offering to facilitate Anti-Racism workshops within the Presbytery.**
- **Direct one of the offerings annually of the Presbytery gatherings toward a project that addresses racial inequity concerns in our region.**
- **Begin Presbytery gatherings with a land acknowledgement to honor the original inhabitants in the region in which we are gathering as the Church.**
- **Form a task force under the authority of the Council to address Anti-Racism initiatives within and for our Presbytery and in our region.**

CALL TO ACTION (Within your Congregation)

- **Engage one another in personal conversations about the particular realities of racism.**
- **Focus some of your Christian formation programs on issues of racism (PCUSA Resources, Book studies, etc.).**
- **Personally, engage in active participation to learn from siblings who are people of color.**
- **Consider joining as a Matthew 25 congregation and make dismantling racism one of your priorities.**
- **Organize for yourself and/or others some form of the 21-day Racial Equity Habit-Building challenge.**

RESOURCES

Presbyterian Study, Training and Discussion Materials

- **Matthew 25: Dismantling structural racism** (www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/racism/)
- PC(USA)'s **Facing Racism** website and resources (<https://facing-racism.pcusa.org>)
- **The Racism Study Pack –The Thoughtful Christian** (www.thethoughtfulchristian.com)

Books

Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson

Rediscovering the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity by David Swanson

Waking up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race by Debbie Irving

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism by Robin DiAngelo

How to Be an Anti-Racist by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi

Dear Church: A Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the U.S. by Lenny Duncan

White Ally Toolkit Workbook by David Camp

Films/TV series

- **13th** (Ava DuVernay)
- **American Son** (Kenny Leon)
- **Blindspotting** (Carlos López Estrada)
- **Clemency** (Chinonye Chukwu)
- **Fruitvale Station** (Ryan Coogler)
- **I Am Not Your Negro** (James Baldwin doc)
- **If Beale Street Could Talk** (Barry Jenkins)
- **Just Mercy** (Destin Daniel Cretton)
- **King In The Wilderness**
- **See You Yesterday** (Stefon Bristol)
- **Selma** (Ava DuVernay)
- **The Hate U Give** (George Tillman Jr.)
- **When They See Us** (Ava DuVernay)

Policy Statements

“On the Church in this Moment in History,” approved by the 224th General Assembly (2020)

“Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community” — PC(USA) churchwide antiracism policy, approved by the 222nd General Assembly (2016). | [Companion study guide](#).

The Confession of 1967—added to the Book of Confessions by the General Assembly(1967).

The Belhar Confession – added to the Book of Confessions by the 222nd General Assembly (2016). | [Study guide](#).