

A Proposal for a 2021 Antiracism Initiative
From Witness Committee
December, 2020

Proposal:

The Witness Committee proposes that the Session of Faith Presbyterian Church adopt and implement an Antiracism Initiative for the year of 2021. With the increasing recognition of the violence sustained by black, indigenous, and people of color, and with the growing awareness of the church's complicity in racism from our earliest history, the purpose of the Initiative would be to educate, discuss, and suggest actions to be taken to support our brothers and sisters of color in whatever way we can.

Background and Considerations:

I. General Assembly Resolution

In keeping with the 2020 General Assembly resolution, "Responding to the Sin of Racism and a Call to Action," the Committee believes that we, as a congregation, should "pledge to join hands and hearts with our BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] siblings to actively confront and dismantle systemic racism in our church and in society at large, and to work for a more just, merciful, and peaceful country that allows all of God's children to flourish." A copy of the General Assembly Resolution is attached to this Proposal.

II. Are We 'Not Racist' or 'Antiracist'?

Understandably, in considering this Proposal, one might be thinking, "I'm not racist. Our church is not racist." Please reflect on the following:

What's the problem with being 'not racist'? It is a claim that signifies neutrality: 'I am not a racist, but neither am I aggressively against racism.' But there is no neutrality in the racism struggle. The opposite of 'racist' isn't 'not racist'. It is 'antiracist'. What's the difference? One endorses either the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an antiracist. One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequalities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequalities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of 'not racist'. The claim of 'not racist' neutrality is a mask for racism.

Kendi, Ibram X., *How to Be an Antiracist*, p. 9.

Note: Ibram X. Kendi is an American author, professor, and historian of race and discriminatory policy in America, and the Director of the Center for Antiracist Research at Boston University. He attended Florida A&M University and Temple University. He won the 2016 National Book Award for his book, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*.

III. Our Tallahassee Black Presbyterian Siblings

Regrettably, there is a history of racism in the Presbyterian community of Tallahassee, which history resulted in the formation of Trinity Presbyterian Church in 1954. This new all black church became involved in the Tallahassee civil rights movement through non-violent participation in the Tallahassee Bus Boycott. In 1960, during the civil rights movement, the Session at Faith Presbyterian voted not to seat black persons at Faith worship services. Faith reversed its prior decision in 1963. Trinity United Presbyterian Church remains the only all black PCUSA congregation in Tallahassee. Please review and consider, "A Call for Reconciliation and Community Building—Letter to the Witness Committee by Ruth Reynolds", attached to this Proposal.

Proposal Implementation:

In implementation of this Proposal, the Committee requests that the Session:

- (1) Provide for all Ruling Elders to participate in a study with the Witness Committee in furthering this Initiative.
- (2) Direct that each Committee evaluate their work and ministry to be more inclusive and to consider how their work might support the efforts of antiracism.
- (3) Authorize the Witness Committee, in conjunction with the Adults and Families Committee, to set up a year-long series of studies, field trips, and discussions to allow the congregation of Faith Presbyterian to participate more fully in the efforts represented by this Initiative.
- (4) Authorize the Staff and Committees to reach out in concrete and loving ways to foster a relationship of mutual respect and fellowship with Trinity United Presbyterian Church.