

I Stand With You Task Force

The members of the *I Stand With You* Task Force invite all members and congregations of the Presbytery of Florida to join us as we recognize, lament, and address the sin of racism in our society.

The Oxford Dictionary defines racism as “prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized.” We understand racism to be both sin and heresy because it denies that all human beings are created in God’s image. (Genesis 1:26-27) Further, we understand that those of us of European ancestry are beneficiaries of “white privilege,” meaning that because of the color of our skin we are heir to a more favorable position in society than are our fellow human beings of red, yellow, black, or brown skin color.

Our country has struggled with the issue of race since 1619. The treatment of indigenous peoples, the enslaving of Africans, and the historic determination that such persons are only 3/5 human has given way to more subtle ways by which white Americans have maintained their superiority.

Examples of individual racism include believing in the superiority of white people, not hiring a person of color because “something doesn’t feel right,” or telling a racist joke. An example of institutional racism includes maintaining “separate but equal” facilities or programs which are not truly equal and are not supported equally. Debby Irving, in her book *Waking up White* says “racism is, and always has been, the way America has sorted and ranked its people in a bitterly divisive, humanity-robbing system.”¹

White privilege is a product of institutional racism. If you are white, it is being able to walk into a store and find that the main displays of shampoo and panty hose are catered toward your hair type and skin tone. It is being able to turn on the television and see people of your race widely represented. It is being able to move through life without being racially profiled or unfairly stereotyped. It is being able to pay for your groceries by check at the corner store. It is attending worship with folks who look just like you and who conduct worship in a way that is consistent with how church “has always been” for you.

American Christianity is deeply tied to European Christianity where the idea of “all conquered peoples are inferior people” is deeply ingrained. Robert Jones, in his book *White Too Long* states “The historical record of lived Christianity in America reveals that Christian theology and

37 institutions have been the central cultural tent pole holding up the very idea of white
38 supremacy.”²
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40 David Gushee takes this a step further as he argues, in a recent issue of *Sojourners*, that the
41 racism embedded in European-American Christianity is not only morally wrong, but heretical. It
42 is heresy because it requires rejecting basic tenets of Christian doctrine, such as the belief that
43 God made all of humankind in God’s own image.³
44
45 White supremacy is not being aware of what “race” you are. It is not having to have “the talk”
46 with your children about how to respond if stopped by police or in another situation that could
47 turn violent or deadly. It is not talking with family members **daily** about racial issues.
48
49 In reality, race is a social, cultural and political construct used by one group of people to
50 dominate another group. According to DNA evidence, there is no biological basis for race.
51
52 This is a critical time for our country -- a critical time especially for those of the majority,
53 dominant culture to realize the wrongs racism and white privilege have caused for so many.

54 It is crucial for white Christians to ask if their theology is a mainstream faith-based empire that
55 serves its own interests, not God's. Does your theology ask whose side is God on – the side of the
56 oppressed or the side of the oppressors?

57 As followers of Jesus Christ, we lament any participation we may have in the systemic racism
58 that can be found in every aspect of our society. We sin when we fail to help, care for, and love
59 all of God’s creation. We believe that unity is a binding force in the Church of Jesus Christ that
60 we should always seek. The Confession of Belhar states that our unity in Jesus Christ is
61 expressed in our love for one another, through our acts of community, and by the giving of
62 ourselves willingly and joyfully for each other’s benefit and blessing. The Confession of Belhar
63 also emphasizes the necessity of shouldering each other’s burdens and sufferings, offering
64 admonishment and comfort for the sake of righteousness, upholding each other in prayer as we
65 serve God together in this world, and fighting against anything that threatens or hinders our unity
66 in Christ.

67 Therefore, in the light of our mandate to unity and solidarity as the Body of Christ, silence is no
68 excuse as we acknowledge ways in which we have been complicit in furthering racism and white
69 privilege. As John Lewis said, “When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you
70 have to speak up. You have to say something; you have to do something.” Now is a critical time
71 to say something and to do something.⁴

72 Our denomination has a 25-year history of developing anti-racism policies for study and action,
73 based on the premise that racism is sin. The 211th General Assembly (1999) approved a

74 statement titled, *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community*. The 222nd General
75 Assembly (2016) reviewed that earlier statement, calling it “lamentably current,” and revised it
76 with the title, *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community*.⁵ Those who wrote the
77 revised policy statement with its accompanying study guides wanted its 13 recommendations to
78 go further and to be bolder. “This is not a time for timidity,” wrote the authors in the
79 introduction, acknowledging that “we have not done enough to change the structures of our
80 society together.”

81 The movement from awareness to action begins with repentance. Consider the following
82 statements from our denomination’s anti-racism policy:

- 83 1. Biblically, we consider racism as a sin against God and against humanity.
- 84 2. Racism is the original sin of the United States. No one alive today created the system of
85 white supremacy. Although we are neither responsible for nor guilty of creating this
86 system, we recognize it as part of our fallen state and as a violation of who we are meant
87 to be together.
- 88 3. Reformed theology includes an account of original sin (a state we find ourselves in
89 regardless of our own choosing) and actual sin (particular ways of being in the world that
90 make original sin concrete and break relationship with God and neighbor)
- 91 4. The truth is racism often cloaks itself in myths and laws that make it difficult to detect by
92 those who benefit from its existence.
- 93 5. Born and raised in a wider culture of racism, some of the prejudice and bigotry has
94 seeped into our minds and hearts.
- 95 6. For those who are white, the temptation simply not to see the advantages that we reap
96 from a sinful system is often too great to resist. And we have not done enough to change
97 the structures of our society together.
- 98 7. God’s church must be sensitive to the cries of victims and the oppressed and, when
99 appropriate, to repent.
- 100 8. Repentance, as an act of accepting and living a new reality, is very much an ongoing
101 responsibility of the church today. The unity we seek as a community rooted and
102 grounded in Christ Jesus depends on our ability to repent.

103 Where do you see yourself in these statements?

104

105 What then should we do? We are reminded of the prophet Micah’s words in Micah 6:8: *He has*
106 *told you, O mortal, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to*
107 *love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

108 God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. There is no such thing as reconciliation with
109 God without reconciliation with our fellow humans. Reconciliation is the key image of the work
110 of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. Christians are called to be reconciled to God and to
111 one another.

112 The Confession of 1967 of the PC(USA) states in Section 4 (“Reconciliation in Society”):

113 *In each time and place, there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the*
114 *church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by*
115 *all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these*
116 *concrete situations. The following are particularly urgent at the present time.*

117 *a. God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, he*
118 *overcomes the barriers between brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based*
119 *on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church is called to bring all men to receive*
120 *and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing,*
121 *education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the*
122 *church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it.*
123 *Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their*
124 *fellowmen, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they*
125 *profess*

126 How does reconciliation begin?

- 127 1. Understand systemic racism by reading books and articles, joining discussion groups, and
128 participating in studies that address the impact of white privilege on today’s society.
- 129 2. Acknowledge that you and others contribute to racism, whether intentionally or
130 unintentionally.
- 131 3. Talk honestly about racism and the impact on people of color.
- 132 4. Stop telling jokes that stereotype people of color and refuse to listen to such jokes.
- 133 5. Examine how you respond/interact with people who are different than you, e.g.,
134 reflecting on whether you would say the same thing to a person of your same race.

135 6. Advocate with congregations of a different racial makeup than yours through engagement
136 in Bible study, social justice issues (food, housing, access to medical care, etc.), and
137 conversation.

138 7. Own your white privilege.

139 The first step in reconciliation is to act, to do what is needed to repair the brokenness caused
140 by the sin. We have acknowledged the sin and confessed it. Now true repentance (a turning
141 and walking in another direction) must begin.

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143 ¹ Debby Irving, *Waking Up White* (Cambridge, MA: Elephant Room Press, 2014), 31.

144 ² Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*
145 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 6.

146 ³ David P. Gushee, “Born in Heresy,” *Sojourners* 49, no. 9 (September-October 2020):34-37.

147 ⁴ In his book, *White Too Long*, Robert P. Jones examines how white Christians’ complicity of
148 silence stems from a perception of the world, faith, and America that has accumulated and been
149 passed down from generation to generation. His review of the history, theology, and sociology of
150 American Christianity sheds light on the legacy of white supremacy that is especially
151 predominant within white evangelical circles. On the understanding that each of us is formed in
152 ways that remain unacknowledged and unconscious, Jones observes, “This theological
153 worldview—Lost Cause theology, premillennialism, an individualist view of sin, an emphasis on
154 a personal relationship with Jesus, and the Bible as the protector of the status quo—has created a
155 mutually reinforcing, closed habit of thought among white evangelicals. The system protects
156 white Christian interests on the one hand and white consciences on the other. In return, white
157 Christians defend the system from external critique, relying on the cultural tool kit it provides”
158 (pp. 104-105).

159 ⁵ The 2016 policy statement and accompanying study guides may be accessed via the following
160 link: [https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/facing-racism-vision-intercultural-
161 community-antiracism-study-guides/](https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/facing-racism-vision-intercultural-community-antiracism-study-guides/)

162 The earlier 1999 statement may be accessed via the following link:
163 https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/_resolutions/facing-racism.pdf

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166 ADDENDUM

167 This is offered for use in a Service of Prayer for those wishing to confess the sin of racism.

168 Confession:

169 As people who have benefitted from White Privilege, we confess that

170 -We have not spoken up regarding past treatment of people of color such as treating them as
171 chattel, removing them from their homes and families, allowing lynchings and less than human
172 treatment and have been responsible for such acts by our silence.

173 -We have not removed references to, including removal of statutes and monuments, the
174 Confederacy and the Civil war without full explanation of correct historical facts concerning
175 slavery

176 -We have not allowed nor welcomed people of color into our congregations, neighborhoods,
177 places of business, places of learning

178 -We have not provided access to opportunity zones

179 -We have not encouraged appointments of people of color to company boards and executive
180 positions

181 -We have not questioned over-policing/racial profiling in minority areas

182 -We have not stopped violence in apprehension of people of color

183 -We have not insisted on bias and de-escalation training of police personnel and citizen review
184 boards of police actions and procedures

185 -We have not promoted reintegration programs with voting rights restored for those leaving
186 incarceration

187 -We have not provided adequate and equal funding for schools located in minority areas along
188 with adequate scholarships

189 -We have not investigated and worked on lowering higher drop-out rates of students in minority
190 schools

191 -We have not provided adequate healthcare, adequate food supplies and affordable housing in
192 minority neighborhoods

193 -We have not acknowledged our white privilege and how we benefit.

194 ***I Stand With You Bibliography***

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