

***A Statement of Solidarity with the Suffering,
and a Plea for Justice Reform in our Society***

From the Social Justice Task Force of Grace Presbytery
June 3, 2020

The crisis which erupted a week ago on Memorial Day by the senseless, brutal murder of George Floyd has exposed (once again) the vast inequities in our system of justice and policing policies across the country. As Presbyterians, we cannot be silent. We are called to bear witness to God's love in the world, especially in times of crisis.

The ravages of racism are all too plain to any person who has even a rudimentary understanding of our nation's history. Slavery, the Jim Crow laws (and associated behaviors), and the assassination of civil rights leaders often show the ugly head of our public understanding of racism. However, racism is systemic and pervasive and persists beyond the Freedom Marches, The Civil Rights Act, the advent of public education, and every law or statute that has been written to combat it. In its most recent iterations, the Black Community disproportionately, and other communities of color, have borne the brunt of the COVID-19 infections and deaths, and it is expressed in the recent killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and countless more. Racism is the troubling original sin of our country.

As Reformed Christians, shaped by a confessional tradition that includes The Declaration of Barmen of 1934¹, we reject any use of religious symbols, such as the Bible, that is not congruent with the biblical mandate to love God and our neighbors as ourselves. And that mandate is most clearly embodied in Jesus who identified himself with the least of these.

As Christians, we answer to one LORD and God of all. We must be willing to examine "the powers, principalities, and authorities" (*Ephesians 6:12*) that govern our living when they perpetuate racism. As demonstrations and peaceful protests are happening all over the nation, we are called:

- to respond as people of faith who believe all people are made in God's image;
- to follow Christ into places of distrust, disunity and discord;
- to listen to the experiences of those who suffer;
- to seek justice, unity, kindness, and loving relationships;
- to accept guidance from the Holy Spirit;
- to have the courage to pray for and seek the energy, intelligence, imagination and love necessary for this moment;
- to work toward eliminating unjust systems of power, privilege and inequality wherever they exist.

¹ PCUSA Book of Confessions, 2016, *The Theological Declaration of Barmen* of 1934 "was written by a group of church leaders in Germany to help Christians withstand the challenges of the Nazi party and of the so-called 'German Christians,' a popular movement that saw no conflict between Christianity and the ideals of Hitler's National Socialism." p. 280.

We want to connect you with PC(USA) resources you may find helpful in this work.² All will teach us and nudge us forward as we follow Christ. We also invite you to share with us via email ways you and your community are engaging in conversation, listening and supporting an atmosphere of unity and diversity that values and respects all people.

As we bear our pain and hope to God, these words adapted from the 2018 Book of Common Worship may help us begin:

Creative and loving God,
we confess our sin and the sin of this world.
You have searched us out and known us
and all that we are is open to you.
We have failed to respect and honor
the gifts you have given us in creation,
and we squander the inheritance of generations to come.
We have sinned against each other
giving in to fear, ignorance, and arrogance.
We are stained by the sin of racism
and fail to respect the gifts of all your peoples.

We have used our power to dominate
and our weakness to manipulate.
We have evaded responsibility
and failed to confront evil.
We have denied dignity
to ourselves and each other.
We have gone away from your path
and fallen into deep despair.

Forgive us for what we have done to hurt others
and the ways we have hurt your earth.
Give us your blessing and help,
so that we may walk in your great love;
through the great peacemaker, your Son, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

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² <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2020/5/29/stated-clerk-remembers-recent-victims-racial-violence/>
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/resources-for-such-a-time-as-this/>
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/opw/2020/06/01/a-time-for-action/>