

## Grace Presbytery for a Social Justice Task Force: PURPOSE STATEMENT

Adopted, Approved, and Established by Grace Presbytery - February 22, 2020

Grace Presbytery, through its Social Justice Task Force, seeks to deepen and widen its witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as “good news” to the fulness of our humanity and to all of creation. The existence of this Task Force bears witness to Presbytery’s conviction that we must actively living out what can often be left to words alone.

The understanding of social justice governing this Task Force shall be rooted in our constitutional documents and approved worship resources, most specifically Book of Order W-5.0304 which states:

*God sends the Church to work for justice in the world: exercising its power for the common good; dealing honestly in personal and public spheres; seeking dignity and freedom for all people; welcoming strangers in the land; promoting justice and fairness in the law; overcoming disparities between rich and poor; bearing witness against systems of violence and oppression; and redressing wrongs against individuals, groups, and peoples. God also sends the Church to seek peace: in the Church universal, within denominations, and at the congregational level; in the world, where nations and religious or ethnic groups make war against one another; and in local communities, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and homes. These acts of peacemaking and justice are established upon God’s gracious act of reconciliation with us in Jesus Christ, and are a way of participating in Christ’s priestly intercession or advocacy for the world.*

The Social Justice Task Force would be empowered to do the following:

1. **Lead the Presbytery in its own faith formation** with respect to the command to love neighbors, and the call of discipleship to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. It is expected that this formation will provide opportunities for growth within as well as outside of Presbytery meetings.
2. **Inform and advise Presbytery leadership and congregations** regarding societal upheaval where a witness in word and/or deed by Grace Presbytery is needed lest the Presbytery’s silence be misinterpreted as assent to an unjust, cruel, or corrupt status quo. It is expected that the Task Force will devise a mechanism through which the Presbytery can speak truth to power, solace to pain, compassion to cruelty, restraint to rage.
3. **Actively engage, and invite others to participate**, in those forms of prayer as it is “expressed in action, through public witness and protest, deeds of compassion, and other forms of disciplined service” (Book of Order W-5.0102). In all matters related to such engagement, it is that the Task Force will strive for the utmost integrity as called for in the vows of ordination.
4. With respect to items 1-3, the Task Force **will seek out**, for the purposes of unity and strength of witness, all opportunities to do its work with ecumenical and interfaith partners.

## Theological Rationale

Each Sunday, Presbyterians pray for the coming of God's new reign with the prayer our Lord Jesus has taught us. This prayer, also part of the rhythm of daily prayer, is considered the prayer of the baptized because it is first learned at the beginning of faith's journey. The prayer Jesus taught intends to fill the imagination of God's children with a vision where all, despite diversity, live together in mutual well-being. To this end, John Calvin labored in the 16<sup>th</sup> century working to re-form the church.

During the year 2009, the PCUSA reflected on the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Calvin's birth and his impact on Reformed faith. In his new book, *John Calvin, Reformer for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* William Stacy Johnson notes that "Calvin's passion for social justice is visible throughout his writings. Just as God is Lord of all, so Calvin fostered a vision of care for all. Calvin was adamant that one of the tests of a good society is whether and how it takes care of the poor." The reformer's passion is an important stream that continues to guide our faith and practice in the present time. Indeed, Calvin's legacy informs the constitutional documents of the PC(USA).

Among the Great Ends of the Church in the *Book of Order* is "the promotion of social righteousness" (F-2.05). The nature of such "promotion" is given more expansive language in *The Form of Government*, and *Directory for Worship*. "The congregation reaches out to people, communities, and the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to gather for worship, to offer care and nurture to God's children, *to speak for social justice and righteousness, to bear witness to the truth and to the reign of God that is coming into the world*" (*italics added*).

United across all differences by the gift of baptism (F-1.0403), the church is called to live out God's call to justice and righteousness, rolling down like a mighty stream, and the river of the water of life that flows from God's throne (W-3.0402).

In the ministry portfolio of each faithful member (G-1.0304) is "working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment." Moreover, every church member is called upon to regularly review and evaluate "the integrity of one's membership, and considering ways in which one's participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful."

Whatever else it is, the church's worship It is to be "countercultural - asserting the scandal of the gospel and anticipating God's reign of righteousness, justice, and peace."

The Sunday prayers (W-3.0308) are to voice a passion for justice petitioning God for "peace and justice in the world; . . . the poor, hungry, and oppressed; compassion and reconciliation in the local community; healing and wholeness for all who suffer."

Those called to ordained leadership within the church must promise to "try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ." "Through its mission in the world, the church seeks to bear witness to God's reign through the proclamation of the gospel, acts of compassion, work for justice and peace, and the care of creation" (W-5.0301).

The *Directory for Worship* (W-5.0304) expands more fully on the church's commitment to God's justice. - *God sends the Church to work for justice in the world:*

***exercising its power for the common good;***

***dealing honestly in personal and public spheres;***

***seeking dignity and freedom for all people;***

***welcoming strangers in the land;***

***promoting justice and fairness in the law;***

***overcoming disparities between rich and poor;***

***bearing witness against systems of violence and oppression;***

***and redressing wrongs against individuals, groups, and peoples.***

In service to Grace Presbytery, the Social Justice Task Force works to provide the Presbytery with leadership, resources, and support to help its churches participate in the eight Constitutional modes of activity deemed essential aspects of God's justice. More particularly, the Task Force is addressing itself to the following questions:

1. Where in Grace Presbytery is there an ongoing biblically and theologically informed conversation regarding the "common good" which is presupposed in the call to love our neighbors as ourselves?
2. How might the Presbytery encourage and support congregations to "deal honestly" in "public spheres?"
3. What might "seeking dignity and freedom for all people" look like at a time with inequity based on race and child separation from parents on the borders?
4. What role should churches play in "welcoming strangers" at a time where some refuse to do so even "in the name of Christ?"
5. How might churches fulfill their call to promote legislative change that moves society in the direction of "justice and fairness?"
6. How can Presbytery help churches identify and address "disparities between rich and poor?"
7. What should "bearing witness against systems of violence and oppression" look like?
8. How can the Presbytery partner with churches "redressing wrongs" in favor of reconciliation and making peace?

Since 1993, the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship* has preserved a prayer for use in corporate and personal worship. The prayer is titled, *For the Human Family*. The 2018 *Book of Common Worship* version reads as follows:

O God, you made us in your own image  
and redeemed us through Jesus your Son.  
Look with compassion on the whole human family,  
take away the arrogance and hatred that infect our hearts,  
break down the walls that separate us,  
unite us in bonds of love,  
and, through our struggle and confusion,  
work to accomplish your purposes on earth;  
that, in your good time,  
all nations and peoples may live in harmony;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.