

Alliance commits to eradicating 'the entrenched racism that grips our nation'

by Paula Clayton Dempsey

Racism is just as woven into the warp and woof of the American fabric as it was 50 years ago when Martin Luther King Jr. gave his life addressing the impact of its evils in our society.

Since then the church universal—and the Alliance of Baptists in particular—has given a nod to confessing our complicity in slavery, all the while benefiting from white privilege and the imbeddedness of systemic racism in our world and lives. The first statement (<https://allianceofbaptists.org/assets/uploads/congregations/Racism1990.pdf>) generated by the Alliance after its formation is a statement of confession of the sins of slavery and of condoning slavery committed by our Baptist forebears.

April 4 the Alliance gathered with the member communions of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and its partners to unite to end racism. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. the NCCC launched a Truth and Racial Justice Initiative, and the Alliance's participation indicates our commitment to do our part to eradicate the entrenched racism that grips our nation, that is embedded in our religious systems, and paralyzes our ability to treat every human being as equal.

As we commit to work toward embodying the beloved community espoused by Martin Luther King, Jr., our journey sounds all too familiar to the journey of the Israelites. Fleeing slavery and oppression, their wilderness wanderings, lengthened by doubt and exacerbated by post-traumatic stress disorder, delayed their attainment of the promised land of God.

An end to slavery and an end to segregation, resisted by many in the church, was just a beginning of our wanderings as a nation and as people of faith. In order to reach the beloved community, we must also address white privilege acknowledging our sin, move beyond our insecurities, and open ourselves to pain and suffering—something which white privilege has allowed us to escape.

Along with the other 37 member communions of the National Council of Churches, the Alliance of Baptists, an ecclesial body that is predominately white, and that values justice and equality, echoes the call to examine our whiteness, the historical roots of U.S. racial oppression, to confront how it is manifest in our lives and in the church today, and invest energy to transform church and society today.

“The time is now! We can unite to end racism—God working through us—one human family. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr's assassination we can draw strength from the martyr and the prophet to recommit to being a drum major for justice,” proclaimed Sharon Watkins, the coordinator of the ACT Now Initiative at our opening session.

May it be so! My soul, and the soul of the church, depend on it.

Paula Clayton Dempsey is director of partnership relations for the Alliance of Baptists.