

## Introduction

The following Statement of Belief, Acknowledgement and Action represents a public commitment by St. John's Norwood Episcopal Church to pursue racial justice and equity. St. John's has historically demonstrated little recognition of the ways it has directly and indirectly benefited from systemic racism, and has contributed to its continuation – by what we have done and what we have left undone. We believe this is morally wrong. With humility and with God's help, we consciously choose a different path forward. We commit our hearts and resources to actively joining the struggle for racial justice and equity in our parish, our community and our nation.

The Vestry of St. John's Norwood  
April 2022

## St. John's Norwood Episcopal Church

### Statement on Race, Justice & Equity: Belief, Acknowledgement and Action

We believe that true repentance is a course correction. To repent is not simply to admit and express regret for past actions and inactions, but it is the active commitment before God and one another to begin actively journeying in the right direction. As part of our life of faith, repentance is not something we do once but is ongoing — a turning and returning to God's way over and over, as part of a lifelong journey. The following statement of Belief, Acknowledgement and Action is our statement of repentance. We state God's truth (Belief), recognize the error of our ways (Acknowledgement) and commit ourselves to a course correction (Action).

#### **Belief**

“A new command I give you: Love one another.  
As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” – *John 13:34*

We believe that all are sacred and cherished equally by God. No human group or culture is inherently superior to another. Every person is a beloved child of God. God calls us to respect the dignity of every human being. Therefore, we reject the sin of racism and the division of people into superficial categories, and reject seeing humanity only in some of us.

We believe that God calls us to liberate the oppressed and speak truth to power. Therefore, we reject silence in the face of the cries of our neighbor for justice and equity.

We believe that God wants shalom for all people. Therefore, we reject entitlement to any benefit from injustice, known or unknown, through systems that privilege some and not all. We reject a society that centers the needs and perspectives of some rather than working to make it a more equitable one, bringing all to the tables where decisions are made.

We believe God's call to do justice is urgent. Therefore, we reject ambivalence in responding to God, intellectualizing the suffering of others, and rationalizing inaction.

We believe the work of ending racism in our communities is a calling for all. Therefore, we reject leaving for others the hard work that is ours to do.

## Acknowledgement

*"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." – John 8:32*

We acknowledge that this nation was established on the lands of other peoples. It was taken by broken promises and by force, in the name of God. The damage done to the original inhabitants of this land is not only in the past, but ongoing.

We acknowledge that chattel slavery played a major role in the establishment and development of our nation. Its legacy continues today. The racial discrimination that was present at the foundation of the nation continues to inform and shape our laws and social frameworks, and reinforces a system of inequality.

We acknowledge that this nation has had a historical pattern of using its systems to preserve white dominance and power. People of color have been and are systematically marginalized through policies, laws, cultural norms and practices that make it exceedingly difficult for them to live authentically and with equal rights. This not only has limited access to housing, food, health and healthcare, education, employment, infrastructure, wealth, justice, political representation and more, but touches every aspect of daily life, large and small.

We acknowledge that for much of its history, the Episcopal Church in America has been complicit in racial discrimination, using the Bible itself to justify segregation, oppression and white supremacy. We acknowledge that many Episcopal institutions were built with enslaved people's labor and benefited financially from the oppression of others.

We acknowledge the racist roots of our parish. St. John's was founded in 1873 by some families in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase area, a number of whom had been enslavers (including the families who gave the land and those who signed the deed) and a former Confederate chaplain, who grew up on a slave-owning plantation and was our first rector. In the early 1900s, St. John's congregation accepted an overtly racist priest who published his bigoted opinions on a regular basis. Until recently, St. John's as a church has not been active in advocating for racial justice and equity. We acknowledge that the reluctance to take action is itself an action with consequences,

and that silence on such matters represents not only complacency but borders on complicity.

We acknowledge that, as with many areas of Montgomery County, the founders of the neighborhoods surrounding our church sought to exclude people of color from buying homes, and later residents used many methods, both formal and informal, to continue this exclusion for decades. This created a continuing pattern of housing segregation in our area that prevented people of color from taking advantage of the financial, educational and employment opportunities and privileges that residents of our neighborhoods continue to enjoy today.

We acknowledge that our welcome of others has often been conditioned on the implicit or explicit, conscious or unconscious, caveat of their assumed assimilation to our ways, traditions, and preferences. While our Episcopal tradition is broad and expansive, we have sometimes let our comfort become a barrier to sharing and learning from the experiences of those different from us.

### Action

*“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? I will, with God’s help.”*

*– Baptismal Covenant, Book of Common Prayer*

We commit to continuing our work for racial justice and equity and viewing it as the urgent call of the Gospel for us today.

We commit to becoming a church community that pursues and embodies antiracism in word and deed.

We commit to a path of achieving racial justice and equity in America that includes addressing and transforming the systemic root causes of racial injustice – social, political, and economic.

We commit to holding ourselves and one another accountable in love to the highest level of respect for the dignity of all people, striving to exemplify to one another how to truly love our neighbor.

We commit consciously and intentionally to working in partnership with affected communities to end racial injustice. We commit to listening deeply to the experiences

of people of color and, with humility, to welcome any correction and discomfort in what we learn.

We commit to restorative initiatives that help level the playing field so that racial equity can be ever-more fully achieved.

We commit to examining our church's practices, policies, and traditions for any systemic obstacles and moving toward a full embodiment of the Episcopal Way of Love, building a community where all see themselves welcomed and reflected.

We commit ourselves as a church to an ongoing journey of education and self-examination on issues of race and equity.

We commit to identifying and removing explicit or implicit messages of white supremacy from our religious and institutional symbols.

We commit to examining our individual and personal implicit biases and positions of privilege, so that we can become Beloved Community in cooperation, authenticity, and integrity.

We commit to striving for shalom for all as lifelong work - over the course of our own lives and the life of the parish. We will invite new members of our community to join our commitment to this work as a matter of faithful living.