

# **A Resolution of Christian Witness in Support of the Southern Conference United Church of Christ Becoming an Anti-Racist and Racial Justice Conference**

**Proposed By:** Conference Minister in conjunction with the Racial Equity Ministry of the Conference

**Summary:** This resolution is a call for the Churches of the Southern Conference, and its Board of Directors, to act in dismantling systemic racism by becoming an “Anti-Racist and Racial Justice Conference”.

**Background:** For over 400 years Black people have had to live with the burden of racism in this country and around the world. The horror of the brutality that has been afflicted upon Black people because of the color of their skin is well documented, from slavery, to emancipation, to reconstruction, to lynching, to Jim Crow, to the Civil rights Movement, and beyond, through gerrymandering and redlining. Black people have dealt with the oppression, dehumanizing, and devaluing effects of racism and white supremacy. The high point of the lynching era has passed. But the memories of those robbed of their lives still live on in the lingering and lived effects.

**Racism is systemic.** It is built into the fabric of our society. It is more than bigotry, bias, and prejudice. It is the power to enforce and embody prejudices and bias into social, economic, political, and religious institutions. It weaves a negative web of hate and violence resulting in a paradigm that empowers some, while dis-empowering others, granting privilege to some while oppressing others.

## **What is Racism?**

Racism is racial prejudice plus power. Racism is the intentional or unintentional use of power to isolate, separate and exploit others. This use of power is based on a belief in superior origin, identity of supposed racial characteristics. Racism confers certain privileges on and defends the dominant group, which in turn sustains and perpetuates racism. Both consciously and unconsciously, racism is enforced and maintained by the legal, cultural, religious, educational, economic, political, and military institutions of societies. Racism is more than just a personal attitude. It is the institutionalized form of that attitude. It is both overt and covert.

**Anti-Racism:** “A conscious intentional effort to eradicate racism in all its forms – individual, cultural, and institutional.”

**Bigotry:** Bigotry is an unreasonable or irrational attachment to negative stereotypes and prejudices.

**Cultural Racism:** “When whites use power to perpetuate their cultural heritage and impose it upon others, while at the same time destroying the culture of ethnic minorities.”

**Racial Justice:** Racial Justice is the systematic fair treatment of people of all

races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. It goes beyond anti-racism.

Fifty-three years ago - on April 14, 1967—the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King gave a captivating speech which he titled “The Other America” at Stanford University. King addressed race, poverty, and economic injustice. King said: “For in the final analysis, the riot is the language of the unheard.” And what is it that America’s failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of justice and freedom have not been met. It has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, humanity, and equality, and it is still true. It is still true that these things are being ignored.

Even now, over 50 years after the passage of significant civil rights legislation, race is still the primary indicator of outcomes in education, health, wealth, employment, criminal justice, social services, and housing. There have been progress and improvements in our public policy and judicial rulings. For example, it is no longer permissible by law to segregate people or deny access to public institutions. But white dominant culture, social structures and belief systems are not as easily changed by laws, and we remain a nation characterized by unconscionable racial inequities. (Persistent Racial Disparities and Inequities)

*They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace- (Jeremiah 8:11)*

As members and friends of the United Church of Christ, as people that claim God is Still Speaking and Jesus is the Head of our Church, we must commit ourselves to fighting this ongoing injustice. The effects of slavery and its offspring, white supremacy and white nationalism and Black oppression are the great cracks in the foundation of American democracy.

As individuals and as local churches we should prayerfully discern how each of us will join the prophet’s call and work to “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

### **Rationale: Why?**

**Racism is a sin.** It creates a dividing wall of hostility binding people to sin and death and removing them from the new humanity received in Christ by virtue of baptism.

The Conference stands against the perpetuation of systemic racism and injustice fueled by the sin of an ideology of white supremacy and privilege. At a time when our world is deeply impacted by a pandemic that has clearly unveiled the gross racial inequities of our country’s health care system, we are once again faced with the dehumanization, discrimination and lynching of African Americans

at the hands of white people.

While data has demonstrated that the disparities and the disproportionalities are overwhelming, 75% of white Americans do not think that there is racial bias in the criminal justice system, and the majority of white Americans don't think that racism is a significant problem in America.

As people of faith we are called to pray, but more than prayer is needed. Yes, speak out, but more than just conversation is needed. People of faith are called upon to act in ways that will rebuild, reform, and reunite this land.

God's desires for us are not shrouded in mystery. God has made it crystal clear how we can please our Creator; the way we should act, what we should value, and how we should relate to the Holy. It's not a question of knowledge but a matter of will." (*New King James Commentary*)

We demand that our lawmakers guarantee that this nation live up to its ideals of liberty and justice for all. We further call upon our political leaders to utilize the power of their offices to engage in the long deep work of dismantling racism through legislation and judicial accountability. We must ensure that every person has the right to live without fear, regardless of color or nationality.

*And will not God grant justice to God's chosen ones who cry to God day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? Luke 18:7*

As people of faith we cannot... WE MUST NOT remain silent in the face of this loss of human life and dignity. We must boldly condemn all forms of racism, bigotry, and discrimination. Hateful ideology and acts are incompatible with the message and promise of the Christian faith. For 400 years we claim our nation as a society which seeks liberty and justice for all. Only by addressing the societal injustices of racism can we validate that claim.

**This idea is nothing new to the Southern Conference or the United Church of Christ:**

One such resource is the Pastoral Letter on Racism and the Role of the Church published in 1991 by the UCC Commission for Racial Justice. The biblical, theological, and political analysis of this ground-breaking document remains relevant for our day. The Pastoral Letter on Racism boldly names the "sin and idolatry of racism" and calls Christians to renew their commitment to be a people grounded in the love and justice embodied in Jesus Christ and the beloved community that King envisioned.

(1991) Rollin Russell, then Conference Minister commented "Racism, in all its overt and covert forms, is an affront to the very foundations of our faith. ...Despite significant progress, our church, society and world are polarized today because of the perverse and destructive sin of racism."

(1991) Dr. Yvonne Delk wrote in the Sojourner magazine “I struggle with answers that flow out of my distant past when African-American people experienced the whips and the chains, slave ships and auction blocks, plantations, the Ku Klux Klan, lynchings, separate but equal, bus boycotts, picket lines, and now the racism of the '90s, which continues to manifest itself East, West, North, and South. And in (1998) “If we are to dismantle racism, we must establish a new, anti-racist ground.

Christian theology calls for the celebration of uniqueness, “So God created humankind in God’s image” (Gen. 1:27), and interdependence “that they may all be one” (John 17:21). God calls us to be in relationship with God and with one another. Since we are all created in the image of God, all of humanity inherently should be free and equal. When our human systems fall short of this reality, it is incumbent upon us as Christians to ensure that we are all treated fairly and justly. “Until all of us are free, none of us are free” (Emma Lazarus); and

**WHEREAS**, The Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ is committed to understanding and counteracting the systemic racism of our culture; and racism is rooted in a belief of the superiority of whiteness and bestows benefits, unearned rights, rewards, opportunities, advantages, access, and privilege on Europeans and European descendants; and

**WHEREAS**, institutionalized racism, laws, customs, traditions, and practices have created multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination, inequities, and injustices on people of color impacting their physical, emotional, physical, and spiritual health and relationships; and

**WHEREAS**, the United Nations World Conference against Racism, and the World Council of Churches has reported that racism is a global epidemic. Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance affirmed that racism has historically through imperialism and colonization created an unequal world order and power balance with present global implications impacting governments, systems, and institutions; and

**WHEREAS**, in the year 2017, the Thirty - First General Synod of the United Church of Christ passed a resolution calling on all judicatory and educational settings of the denomination to include the study of culture diversity/sensitivity and institutional racism in clergy preparation and continuing education, and as a requirement for maintaining standing for all persons engaged in authorized ministry within and on behalf of the United Church of Christ; and

**WHEREAS**, the denomination has shown leadership among many United Church of Christ conferences, associations, and local congregations by initiating innovative antiracism programs, by developing anti-racism facilitators, and in general have made dismantling racism a priority, there is still much to be done. As we continue in this effort, the work we do must reflect the historical and present experiences and stories of all peoples impacted by racism. We must

work from a paradigm reflective of the historical relationships of racial and ethnic groups and racial oppression within the United Church of Christ and society; and

**WHEREAS**, there are growing movements of peace that have people of all races, backgrounds, and ages involved, urging us to expand our knowledge of what racism is and study its ramifications on all people; and

**WHEREAS**, General Synods of the United Church of Christ have, since 1963, voted eleven resolutions, statements, and pronouncements denouncing racism, and it is time to honor mandates and expectations of this body and of the church: and

**WHEREAS**, the marks on anti-racist conference includes the shift from:

- White idolatry and supremacy to the equal valuing of all races.
- Denial to truth: facing, speaking, and listening to each other.
- White power and privilege to re-distributive justice.
- Fear and guilt to healing, reconciliation, and new community.

**THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED**, that the Southern Conference United Church of Christ is called to be and declares itself to be an Anti-racist Conference, and that we encourage all Conferences and Associations and local churches and institutions of the United Church of Christ to adopt anti-racism mandates, including policy that encourages anti-racism programs for all United Church of Christ staff and volunteers; and

**LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Southern Conference and its Associations local churches and institutions facilitate programs within their churches that would examine both historic and contemporary forms of racism and its effects and that the programs be made available to the churches; and

**LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED**, the staff and ministry teams of the Southern Conference be required to engage in unpacking bias and dismantling racism education; and CALLS UPON the churches, institutions and members of the Southern Conference to make anti-racism a priority by engaging or re-engaging in the Sacred Conversation on Race, by using denominational materials or other resources with emphasis on unpacking bias and dismantling racism; and

**LET IT BE FINALLY RESOLVED** that the Southern Conference will report the progress of the development and implementation of these programs. The implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the Conference and the funds available.