

A knee on a neck
laying bare for all to see
the evil of
callous
souls
entitled
power
choking the life from
God's beloved
just because.
We know what must change. Will we, church?
We have written many
true, significant,
sometimes even sincere words.
We have confessed:
Belhar, C' 67, Barmen... Enough words?
Never enough witness.
We know we must change. Will we, church?
Kairos.¹

¹ "On the Church in This Moment in History—Responding to the Sin of Racism and a Call to Action," pc-biz.org, Presbyterian Church (USA) 224th General Assembly, June 26, 2020, <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000727>.

RATIONALE FOR SALEM PRESBYTERY RACIAL EQUITY TRAINING

Kairos is “a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment.”² Sadly, the events of the past several years have made manifest racial inequities in our communities. Even more recently we have witnessed *BIPOC* (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) populations experience disproportionate morbidity and mortality from COVID-19, as well as continued prejudicial and inequitable treatment from the criminal justice system. As Christians dedicated to seeking reconciliation, we must confess that these events are rooted in the reality of sin, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

We all live through the lenses of our experiences, but individual experience is insufficient if we are to relate to others in the ways in which God calls us, Jesus taught us, and the Spirit leads us. If we are to understand our history from a broader perspective, including the voices of the silenced, we will realize that racism has been a part of what became the United States since the time of European Colonization and the foundation of an economy dependent upon the labor of enslaved Africans. From the time of the original colonial settlements, indigenous communities were decimated by disease and genocide as Europeans sought westward expansion, appropriating land and dislocating thousands. Latinx and Asian immigrants have, at times, been both welcomed and excluded, depending upon whether or not their labor met a need for sustained economic growth. Even groups of immigrants from “undesirable” parts of Europe faced the trade off of cultural identity in exchange for assimilation into systems based upon white supremacy.

From our founding, our systems (legal, educational, health, economic, etc.) have been infused with the elements of racial inequity. While we have modified and evolved over time (including fighting a civil war and amending the US Constitution), some of those initial biases favoring those who are white persist. These cannot change without concerted effort and demand reimagination. In the wise words of Pastor Carolyn B. Helsel:

*The movement toward great racial justice needs.... people like you and me—people who may not consider ourselves to be very radical—to reconsider where race continues to operate in our society and in our lives, and to make a difference in the areas where we can.... [E]veryone can learn how to talk about race, to stay in the conversation long enough, so that when the opportunity for you to act comes, you will know what to do.*³

We know we must change. Will we, Church?

In 2016, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a comprehensive churchwide anti-racism policy, “Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community.” The policy states:

² “kairos.” Merriam-Webster.com. 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (27 June 2021).

³ Carolyn Helsel, *Anxious to Talk about it: Helping White Christians Talk Faithfully about Racism*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2017), 2.

Racism is the opposite of what God intends for humanity. It is the rejection of the other, which is entirely contrary to the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. It is a form of idolatry that elevates human-made hierarchies of value over divinely-given free grace. Through colonization and slavery, the United States of America helped to create and embrace a system of valuing and devaluing people based on skin color and ethnic identity. The name for this system is white supremacy. This system deliberately subjugated groups of people for the purpose of material, political, and social advantage. Racism is the continuing legacy of white supremacy. Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others. It is also a lie about God, for it falsely claims that God favors parts of creation over the entirety of creation.⁴

Such a claim recognizes that structural racism is not only the “opposite of what God intends for humanity,” but is also an example of how sin is systemic rather than simply personal.⁵ This understanding of the structural nature of sin is deeply rooted in our Reformed heritage.

Reformed theology offers a nuanced understanding of sin. Calvin did not understand sin to be simply an individual belief, action, or moral failing (Calvin, 1960). Rather, he viewed sin as the corporate state of all humanity. It is an infection that taints each of us and all of us. No part of us — not our perception, intelligence, nor conscience — is unclouded by sin.⁶

We know we must change. Will we, Church?

As the late theologian James Cone once said, we must:

...bear witness to the Gospel's transcending racial bonding and move toward human bonding. We need some signs of that transcending. Where will they come from if not from the church? And how will these signs be expressed, except by preachers and priests and rabbis?⁷

Our Scripture,⁸ our reformed theology, and our church polity all clarify that the work of reforming systems of racial inequity is not optional for Christians. It is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship if we are to live into the great ends of the Church - the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world (F-1.0304).

⁴ Victor Aloyo et al, “Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community Churchwide Antiracism Policy,” pcusa.org, Presbyterian Church (USA) 222nd General Assembly, 2016.
https://pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/racialjustice/new_2016_antiracism_policy.pdf.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ James Cone, “Theologians and White Supremacy: An interview with James H. Cone,” interview by George M. Anderson, S.J., American Magazine. November 20, 2006.

⁸ Exodus 24:7; Leviticus 16:32-35; Psalm 9:7-10; Proverbs 2:1-15; Isaiah 11:2-9; Luke 6:20-26; Luke 10:25-37; Romans 12:3-8; Second Corinthians 5:16-19; Galatians 3:28-29; Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 4:2-6; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:8; Colossians 3:11-17; Revelation 2:2-5; these passages are just a *small* sample of the ways Scripture calls us to work for the reconciliation of the world.

In order to transcend racial bonding and move toward human bonding, and to live more fully into our Christian identity, we must heed the admonition of [1 John 3:13-18](#) and acknowledge that a refusal to act is a rejection of God's love...

We know we must change. Will we, Church?

Our reformed tradition recognizes God's prophetic call, modeled by Jesus Christ and affirmed by the Holy Spirit to do justice; therefore, we have the responsibility to declare that the power of God prevails over nationalist values. Acting on our convictions now, with clarity, could make a tangible difference in the preservation of God's Truth, the promotion of social righteousness and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven. Only talking about race is insufficient to change the status quo and disrupt the dominant racial dynamic in which white supremacy influences how every system in our nation operates.

We need to build a collective around a common language or set of tools that helps all to recognize and articulate injustice where it is met and to work forcefully to bend the arc of history toward justice. Though we recognize that requiring such a training cannot fully heal the sin of racism, we believe establishing a common foundation is a necessary first step towards reconciliation.⁹

Through well-planned and well-administered racial equity training, Salem Presbytery could create a critical mass of persons who are prepared to be witnesses for God's beloved community. This could set the course for the Church for years to come...

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⁹ Acts 8:26-40 - When Philip met with the Ethiopian Eunuch his witness provided a common language for the movement of the Holy Spirit to establish roots and produce fruit, from which a long tradition of people of faith were born.

Be it resolved that Salem Presbytery adopts the following policies and procedures to be added to the Manual of Salem Presbytery as the “Salem Presbytery Racial Equity Training Policy”:

1. Salem Presbytery, in its commitment to the Matthew 25 vision and Jesus’ command that we love as he loves us, shall offer, provide resources for, and publicize educational opportunities that focus on dismantling structural racism within our church institutions (Presbytery and congregations) and the communities we serve. Salem Presbytery shall provide annual racial equity training that is both didactic and experiential to incorporate the following elements and concepts:
 - a. The biblical and theological grounding for our call to eradicate racial and cultural discrimination in church and community life;
 - b. The histories of our church, region, and state;
 - c. Core concepts of institutionalized racism and its manifestation at the individual and societal levels;
 - d. Awareness of the impact of church policies and decisions on people of color; and
 - e. Tools and strategies to develop anti-racist behavior and culture within our church life and the larger communities the church serves.
2. Racial Equity Policy Training Requirements
 - a. Racial Equity training shall be required once every three years for:
 - i. Ministers of Word and Sacrament actively serving as pastors to congregations or otherwise engaged in a validated ministry within the bounds of Salem Presbytery;
 - ii. Commissioned Ruling Elders actively serving a congregation;
 - iii. Certified Christian Educators;
 - iv. Salem Presbytery Members-At-Large; and
 - v. Presbytery Staff;
 - b. Racial Equity training is strongly encouraged for Honorably Retired Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Ruling Elders serving Salem Presbytery Committees and Task Forces or representing Salem Presbytery, Candidates for ministry under care of Salem Presbytery, members of individual Sessions and Church Staffs within the Presbytery, and any other leaders within the church.
3. Racial Equity Training Policy Administration and Enforcement
 - a. The Racial Equity Training Policy will be administered by the Peace and Justice Task Force. The Peace and Justice Task Force shall be responsible for the implementation of all trainings, the approval of alternate trainings, and evaluation of the efficacy and impact of trainings.
 - b. The Stated Clerk shall be responsible for ensuring that proper notation of participation is made in the permanent files for all whom training is required and notifying them of compliance deadlines.
 - c. The Executive Presbyter shall communicate non-compliance in reference checks for those who have not completed the required training, or an approved alternate, within the specified time frame.
4. Racial Equity Training Policy Implementation
 - a. Racial Equity training shall be provided at least once per year at a location to be determined by the size of the class.

- i. For those unable to attend a scheduled training, an alternate training shall be permitted with the prior approval of the Peace and Justice Task Force.
- b. Upon adoption of the Racial Equity Training Policy, all required to receive training shall have three years to complete the requisite training or approved alternate.
- c. Those entering Salem Presbytery, whether as a Minister of Word and Sacrament, Presbytery Staff, or other designated position for whom racial equity training is required, shall complete the requisite training within one year of their date of hire/start of call.
- d. The Racial Equity Training Policy requirements shall be written into terms of call for all who serve within the bounds of Salem Presbytery.¹⁰

¹⁰ Nota Bene: Much of this document was shaped or directly quoted from policies created and enacted by the following Presbyteries: [Sheppards & Lapsley \(AL\)](#), [Baltimore \(MD\)](#), [Charlotte \(NC\)](#)*p.21-23, and [New Castle \(DE and MD\)](#). We are indebted to their hard work and wisdom.