

Item 00-29: On the Church in This Moment in History – Responding to the Sin of Racism and a Call to Action

Approved by the 224th General Assembly (2020) as amended

Affirmative: 407

Negative: 32

“Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.”

-Isaiah 58:12 (NRSV)

This 224th General Assembly of the PC(USA) declares that Black lives matter; that our country’s most important institutions have been built to sustain white privilege, to protect white lives and white property at the expense of our siblings of color; and that the church, through ignorance, denial, and in some cases deliberate action, has participated in this injustice. We have been slow to face the reality of systemic racism. We have been slow to acknowledge the pain of our fellow Presbyterians, of our fellow Christians, of our fellow citizens, and of those who have come to America for a better life, whose value has been judged by the color of their skin. We pledge to join hands and hearts with our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) siblings to actively confront and dismantle systemic racism in our church and in society at large, and to work for a more just, merciful, and peaceful country that allows all of God’s children to flourish.

The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly recommends that the 224th GA (2020)

1. Call all Presbyterians to hear and heed the Gospel imperative to love God, neighbor, and self by living out a deeper commitment to active participation with Jesus Christ in the work of building God’s kingdom through

1. Personal and corporate repentance, spiritual renewal, and devotion to the Great Ends of the Church. Repenting, both personally and corporately, for the role we as individuals and as a predominantly White-dominated church played in history and continue to perpetuate today, even if unknowingly, in systemic racism and White Supremacy, especially in terms of our own local silence, silencing those who attempt to speak or act, and our failure to act regarding police brutality, voter suppression, educational and healthcare inequality, and other acts of systemic racism on federal, state, and local levels

2. Listening and responding to the voices of peoples long silenced through programs such as Hands and Feet: Presbyterians Engaging in Communities, the Poor People’s Campaign, and Freedom Rising, approved by the 222nd General Assembly

3. Energetic, intelligent, imaginative, and loving involvement in the Matthew 25 Initiative and its intertwined foci: building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism, and eradicating systemic poverty

2. Direct the Co-Moderators of the 224th General Assembly (2020) to facilitate a time of silent vigil of 8 minutes and 46 seconds as a symbolic representation in solidarity with our BIPOC siblings, and of

corporate lament and personal introspection of our complicity in perpetuating systemic racism and racial injustice before the adjourning of the 224th General Assembly (2020).

3. Direct the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency to review all items of business referred from the 224th General Assembly (2020) to the 225th General Assembly (2022) to consider prayerfully whether the recommendations could be enacted under current social witness policy or the authority of agencies and their boards to make programmatic decisions between assemblies.

4. Call congregations, sessions, presbyteries, and synods to review items of business referred from the 224th General Assembly (2020) to the 225th General Assembly (2022) and prayerfully consider the call of God to work and witness for the goals and values expressed therein, in particular the following items as starting points for developing plans for action in dismantling structural racism at every level of the PC(USA):

1. [02-020, "Disparities Experienced by Black Women and Girls Task Force Report"](#)
2. [02-034-INFO, "Special Committee on Racism, Truth, and Reconciliation Progress Report with Recommendation"](#)
3. [02-041, "Lazarus is Walking in Baltimore - from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy"](#)
4. [02-084, "A Resolution Addressing the Lack of Installed Pastoral Leadership in People of Color Congregations in the PC\(USA\) - From the Racial Equity Advocacy Committee"](#)
5. [02-100, "Approval of Part 1 of the 2021–2022 Mission Work Plan for the Presbyterian Mission Agency—From the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board," especially the sections on dismantling structural racism](#)

5. Recommend that PC(USA) congregations, mid-councils, and all General Assembly Entities develop and adopt an antiracism policy in their bylaws by engaging Item 02-137, "On Amending G-3.0106 to Add an Antiracism Policy with Suggested Training for All Members of Each Council." This work can be done now at all levels, even in advance of the 225th General Assembly, at which time that General Assembly can act on setting a constitutional requirement to do so if it chooses.

6. Honoring the spirit of Item 02-034-INFO - the Progress Report from the Special Committee on Racism, Truth, and Reconciliation and its conclusions regarding the need to address "institutional racism and oppression within the church" and "to call the church to do the hard work of repair necessary for reconciliation," we direct the Special Committee on Racism, Truth, and Reconciliation to prepare for the 225th General Assembly (2022) a report deconstructing white privilege within our own denomination's (and predecessor denominations') history of involvement in the colonization, enslavement, oppression, and genocide of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), including theological support and benefits to our institutions. The report should also include a study of our denomination's history of prophetic witness, resistance and abolition, and make recommendations towards proposed amends, reparations, and reconciliation.

7. Thank the Stated Clerk for adding his signature to the Open Letter of the Poor People's campaign and direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to commend the use of the learning resources and the Open Letter of the Poor People's campaign as educational tools for congregations.

8. Commend to the entirety of the PC(USA), its members, congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the GA entities the poem included in the rationale and retyped here for reading, reflection, meditation.

A knee on a neck
laying bare for all to see
the evil of
callous
soulless
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.

We believe that the work of attending to the pain, suffering, and long-standing oppression of our BIPOC siblings in Christ is central to our work of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When Black Americans are killed at twice the rate of white Americans (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>) we have much to lament. We, in particular white people, and as a predominantly white denomination, must confess our complicity in perpetuating systems of oppression against our BIPOC siblings. The church must be the first place seeking racial justice and reconciliation, the dismantling of structural racism, and the healing of our marginalized communities. It has, unfortunately, not often been so. We must have our own denominational and congregational houses in order. We must dare to be an image of hope for those around us.

While we recognize and honor the work towards justice that has been happening and continues at every level of the PC(USA), we also name that in this time it is not enough. We must become actively antiracist in our theology, policy, and praxis. When our colleagues, siblings, and neighbors protest in the

streets to say that being Black should never be an excuse to be targeted and killed, when so many stand in solidarity to say #BlackLivesMatter, and when our own communities are weighed down in grief and anger, it is the time to stand alongside our BIPOC siblings in voice and in action.

bell hooks, an American author and social activist says this, “Love is an action, never simply a feeling.” If we claim to love our neighbor, especially our BIPOC neighbors, we are called to action. We have said a lot and not done enough. Acknowledging the grief of our siblings in Christ and naming that the Church has a primary calling to be repairers of the breach means nothing without moving towards action. We cannot wait until the 225th General Assembly to begin again to take action.