

**Recommendation for Racial Justice:  
A Vision for Inter-racial Justice Ministry and Reconciliation**

The God who heard the groaning of the Hebrew people in Egypt surely hears the groaning of the African-American community and of all who now suffer in racism, injustice and divisiveness, and calls the Church to respond with urgency.

Whereas the witness of the Bible is that every human being is equally created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), equally in need of grace (Rom. 3:22-24), and equally precious to and beloved by God as evidenced in that Christ has given his life for each (John 3:16), and

Whereas the Constitution of our church, in accord with the Scriptures, includes in the Great Ends of the Church “the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God... the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world,” and

Whereas our time and place in history cries out for the Church to bear powerful and fruitful witness in word and action to the unity of the human race before God and in God’s family, to focus attention upon those communities which are not being accorded the equal respect and opportunity - including at the forefront African Americans - and to lead in the work of racial justice with all the opportunity, power, wisdom and love given us by the Holy Spirit, until “justice rolls down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24);

Be it resolved that the Presbytery of Salem of the PC(USA) calls upon its congregations to affirm *the principle that black lives matter* by working, “vigorously for freedom and justice for Black people and, by extension, all people.”

**As an expression of this commitment, the Presbytery will promote and support interracial justice ministry by:**

- a. Providing resources, such as brochures, articles, and study guides which may include a clear understanding of *the principles and values* of the Black Lives Matter movement and other platforms led by people of color for the liberation of people of color. Resources should be based on biblical principles of justice and in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ, including but not limited to, denominational resources such as *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community Churchwide Antiracism Policy* and the *#SpeakAntiRacism Campaign*, as well as other materials which address the systemic nature of racism and white privilege in our churches and society.

b. Offering trained liaisons from the Presbyterian Inter-racial Dialogue (and others within our presbytery) who are equipped to facilitate meaningful and transformational dialogue regarding racial justice issues by creating space for open dialogue throughout our presbytery. This dialogue must lead to practical and social actions of justice which bears the fruit of equity for people of color and authentic racial reconciliation for all.

c. Increasing the visibility of anti-racism efforts in the presbytery by: 1) Allotting time during Presbytery meetings for congregations to report on their efforts and seek advice; 2) Preparing case studies of congregational efforts to overcome structural racism to inspire and guide similar efforts across the presbytery; 3) Forming an “Anti-Racism Coalition” (A.R.C.) in our presbytery tasked with equipping, supporting and creating opportunities for education, dialogue and collective action toward achieving racial justice in our churches and communities. This coalition will be overseen by Salem Presbytery’s Peace and Justice Task Force and will consist of a diversity of voices who are called to eradicate racism with energy, intelligence, imagination and love.

**Furthermore, the Presbytery calls on congregations to take at least one new intentional step toward racial justice and reconciliation within the coming year, including:**

d. Engaging in interracial justice ministry by working with community partners to identify and address at least one local issue affecting the quality of life in communities of color, such as equity in education, housing, economic opportunity, access to a clean and healthy environment, and others. Congregations may want to show their commitment to interracial justice by also placing a banner which states “Black Lives Matter” on individual church properties, inside their buildings, or in designated visible areas as deemed appropriate by their Sessions as a sign of public witness (Luke 4: 18-19; Psalm 9:9). Banners are encouraged to share lines of scripture such as, “You Shall Love your Neighbor as Yourself” (Mark 12:31) to ground the statement “Black Lives Matter” as primarily a theological position rather than a political one. Only by urgently taking actions for justice together will racial reconciliation be authentically possible.

### **Rationale:**

At the height of the civil rights movement, our Confession of 1967 recognized the church’s urgent responsibility to provide leadership in the struggle for racial justice, proclaiming: “In each time and place, there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations... God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family... Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it.”[1] Yet, the church recognizes that all children in God’s family are still not treated equally by the principalities and systemic structures of our society.

Historically, black lives have endured with resilience the outrageous evils of slavery, segregation, and murderous practices of public lynching during the Jim Crow era.[2] Today, black lives continue to face systemic evils of injustice, including: mass incarceration[3], brutal treatment by law enforcement[4], under-resourcing of their neighborhoods and schools[5], disproportionate exposure to hazardous waste[6], voter suppression, gerrymandering, and hostile displays of white supremacy on the streets and in their churches. Throughout history the church has been called by the Holy Spirit to respond with visible signs of promoting racial justice, equality, and unity so that, in the words of the Confession of Belhar, “the world may believe that separation, enmity, and hatred between people and groups is sin... may have no place in the church, and must be resisted” as an expression of God’s will “to bring about justice and true peace among people.”[7] Now is such a time.

Understanding that the church is not called to be silent or to avoid conflict, but is called to “witness against and strive against any form of injustice... [as well as] against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others,”[8] we take a stand to declare that Black Lives Matter.

This does not mean, however, that all lives are not important. The polarization and politicization which has pitted black lives against blue lives is not our intention.[9] We declare that our struggles are not primarily with these individuals, but with the “cosmic powers of this present darkness”[10] which have sustained and perpetuated systemic cycles of violence, poverty, and oppression toward people of color for centuries. As people who worship a God that shows unwavering special concern for people who are poor and vulnerable (Deuteronomy 24:17-19; Mark 7:25-30; Luke 6:20-22), it is appropriate to affirm that “Black Lives Matter” to direct particular attention and energy toward communities of color, which have been marginalized, under-resourced, and oppressed. Jesus does not say “Blessed are *all people*,” but “Blessed are *the poor*...” (Luke 6:20). When Jesus proclaims good news to the poor, release to the jailed, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:16-19) he does not mention the rich, the prison-owners, the sighted and the oppressors.

In a denomination that is currently 90% white[11], it is the church’s calling to do our part in dismantling the demonic presence of white supremacy and systemic racism. The first step in this process is, as our Brief Statement of Faith (1991) puts it, “to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,” [12] allowing the values, concerns, and leadership of people of color to guide our efforts toward racial justice and reconciliation. People of color did not create a racist society; white people alone have done this. Through the liberating movements of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), we recommend that the congregations of Salem Presbytery take a visible stand against racism in all its forms, as one united church, by educating ourselves openly, honestly and non-defensively; by learning how to communicate to others about the systemic nature of white supremacy and racism in our institutions and individual lives; and through the exemplification of the Kingdom of God to the world by making visible and sacrificial commitments in our churches for the sake of racial justice and

reconciliation. Until we stand together collectively, racism will continue to persist. Until we can proclaim with one voice that “Black Lives Matter,” all lives do not matter.

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[1] The Confession of 1967, 9:43-44

[2] Over the past two years a task force from Salem Presbytery’s Peace and Justice Committee has been locating and commemorating sites where public lynchings have occurred in our own cities and towns. Some commemorating sites have been in the townships of Graham and Salisbury and they are continuing to explore others directly related to our cities and towns.

[3] In 2016, blacks represented 12% of the U.S. adult population but 33% of the sentenced prison population. Whites accounted for 64% of adults but 30% of prisoners. And while Hispanics represented 16% of the adult population, they accounted for 23% of inmates. In 2016, there were 1,608 black prisoners for every 100,000 black adults - more than five times the imprisonment rate for whites (274 per 100,000) and nearly double the rate for Hispanics (856 per 100,000) according to <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/12/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison>.

[4] African Americans are two to three times more likely to face a hostile situation during a routine traffic stop and 84% of police officers have stated in a recent survey that they have directly witnessed a fellow officer using more force than was necessary. (US Department of Justice)

[5] According to the most current briefing on public education held before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, “Students who live in high-poverty neighborhoods often attend schools that lack the financial resources to provide them with quality educational opportunities, as school resource are so closely tied to the wealth of the surrounding community. An achievement gap has resulted and persisted, largely between students who attend well-funded schools in low-poverty neighborhoods and the most disadvantaged students--often students of color and students from poor households--who attend poorly-funded schools in high-poverty neighborhoods” (page 5). In Forsyth county, 43 of the 81 schools are Title One according to the Winston Salem/Forsyth County Schools webpage. See: [www.wsfcs.k12.nc.us](http://www.wsfcs.k12.nc.us).

[6] Bullard, R.D., P. Moahai, R. Saha, and B. Wright. 2007. Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: A Report Prepared for the United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries. Online at: [http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries\\_toxic-waste-20](http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries_toxic-waste-20). This study shows that people of color comprise a majority (56%) in neighborhoods with commercial hazardous waste facilities, and a large majority (> 66%) in neighborhoods with clustered facilities, while non-host neighborhoods are 30% people of color. Race is a stronger predictor of where hazardous waste facilities are located than income, education, and other socioeconomic indicators.

[7] Confession of Belhar 10.3 & 10.7

[8] Confession of Belhar 10.7

[9] “Two-thirds of police officers (67%) say the highly publicized deaths of blacks during encounters with the police are isolated incidents, while 31% describe them as signs of a broader problem. Moreover, the survey finds that majorities of officers in virtually every major demographic group share this view, with one striking exception. A majority of black officers (57%) say these deaths are evidence of a broader problem between police and blacks, a view held by only about a quarter of all white (27%) and Hispanic (26%) officers. Black female officers in particular are more likely to say these incidents signal a more far-reaching concern. Among sworn officers, 63% of black women say this, compared with 54% of black men. By contrast, roughly equal proportions of white male officers (27%) and white female officers (29%) say the same. Among Hispanic officers, about a quarter of men (26%) and 32% of women say the incidents reflect a broader problem.” See, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/01/11/police-fatal-encounters-and-ensuing-protests/>.

[10] Ephesians 6:12

[11] In Salem Presbytery there are 139 churches of which 20 are African American, 5 are Hispanic, and 1 is Korean.

[12] A Brief Statement of Faith -- PC(USA), 11.4.70 (1991)