

Purpose: to respond to the call of the 2020 GA by specifically adopting the following portions of “The Sin of Racism” as specific commitments by the Presbytery of Lake Michigan and as recommendations to its congregations for actions.

On the Church in This Moment in History—Responding to the Sin of Racism and a Call to Action

**“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)

The Presbytery of Lake Michigan 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 Presbytery of Lake Michigan supports the following actions:

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
 - a. 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.
 - b. Listening and responding to the voices of peoples long silenced, through participation in programs such as Hands and Feet: Presbyterians Engaging in Communities, and the Poor People’s Campaign, and Freedom Rising, approved by the 222nd General Assembly (2016).
 - c. 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. Recommend that the Presbytery of Lake Michigan congregations 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 (2022), at which time that General Assembly can act on setting a constitutional requirement to do so if it chooses.

3. 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.”

4. Commend to the congregations of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan 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 practice. 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 (2022) to begin again to take action.

Resources

Congregations and sessions within the Presbytery of Lake Michigan are encouraged 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):

- a. 02-020, “Disparities Experienced by Black Women and Girls Task Force Report”
- b. 02-034-INFO, “Special Committee on Racism, Truth, and Reconciliation Progress Report with Recommendation”
- c. 02-041, “Lazarus Is Walking in Baltimore—From the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy”
- d. 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”
- e. 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