

AN APOLOGY TO OUR AFRICAN AMERICAN SISTERS AND BROTHERS FOR THE SIN OF SLAVERY AND ITS LEGACY

INTRODUCTION

The Bible says that God “delights” in justice (Jer. 9:24). In Amos, the LORD calls for the people to “establish justice in the gate” and “let justice roll down like waters” (Amos 5:15, 5:24). The prophet Micah states that what the LORD requires is “to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). God delights in justice. Racism, as systemic inequality, is fundamentally unjust and therefore against the will of God.¹

We learn from history that since Bacon’s Rebellion in 1677, white supremacy was a conscious, calculated effort using the legal systems, and economic and physical intimidation to perpetuate and institutionalize white supremacy and privilege. After the Civil war, white Americans controlled economic and political systems that resulted in lynching, Jim Crow, Black Codes, white citizens’ councils, poverty, racial profiling, school to prison pipeline, and mass incarceration. Even today we continue to prolong racial inequality through codifying white supremacy. We apologize for being complicit for the last 400 years in perpetuating these injustices.

We recognize as people of faith that the only appropriate path to healing and reconciliation is to acknowledge the wrongs that we, the Presbyterian Church, as part of the institutional church structure, were complicit in perpetuating. This was done through interpretation of selected scriptures and rationalization to justify human bondage and perpetuate white supremacy and privilege. We apologize for this transgression.

We acknowledge that Black lives have been devalued beginning with slavery and their human dignity continues to be circumvented through the economic and legal systems that are racist as institutions. We apologize for benefiting from and continuing to be part of this social, economic, and legal construct. We recognize that the presence and persistence of racism in ourselves and our institutions is the result of the sin of slavery.

We recognize the necessity of building a trusting relationship between White Americans and African Americans. Healing and reconciliation can only be done by acknowledging that slavery is the economic, artistic, and religious foundation on which this country is built.

The Presbytery of Giddings Lovejoy apologizes to our African American sisters and brothers for all the wrongs that have been done throughout our history and those that are on-going.

¹ *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community Antiracism Study Guides, pg. 3.*

A LITANY OF REPENTANCE

As white Christians we repent of our complicity in the belief in white supremacy: the belief that people of European descent are superior in intelligence, skills, imagination, and perseverance. We acknowledge that this belief in white supremacy has been the foundation of and an excuse for atrocities against people of African descent in the United States and in the world.

We repent of our failure to recognize and take responsibility for the legacy of slavery.

We repent of the injustice, pain, humiliation, and suffering imposed on African Americans by our ancestors and ourselves through actions and inaction. We repent of our complicity in failing to act in mutual loving relationship.

We repent of closing our eyes to the degradation and injustice forced upon our fellow African American sisters and brothers: sisters and brothers who were enslaved, segregated, terrorized, and imprisoned.

We repent of covering our ears to the crying of families torn apart, to the sound of human flesh being struck, while songs of freedom and heavenly grace flow from our lips.

We repent that we have failed as an institution and as individuals to use our voices to abhor and end lynching, segregation, and racial profiling. We regret our generations of silence on these issues so that we could maintain a comfortable life in our churches, homes, and communities.

We repent of shutting our hearts to the experiences of fellow humans whose stories of pain, suffering, hardship, struggle, love and joy mirror our own life journeys, yet are deprived of privilege and marred by racism. We have turned our backs and walked away pretending not to see, yet we saw, pretending not to know, yet we knew, and convincing ourselves that we were not complicit, yet we are.

We now know that we as white Christians have benefitted directly and indirectly from these injustices. We name ourselves as complicit and repent.

Finally, we repent of our violent efforts to suppress Black agency as African Americans, since the time of slavery, actively pursued their freedom...built this country...laid foundational structures...and have demonstrated their capacity to fully participate in the construction of this American society in spite of white supremacy.

As repentance means turning and going the other way, with Christ's help we seek to do so. At the same time we commit ourselves to walking with our sisters and brothers of African descent toward the goal of healing, reconciliation, and eliminating racism as we seek to dismantle white privilege.

RATIONALE

In October 2019, the Dismantling Racism and Privilege team (DRAP) of the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy organized a Journey of Reconciliation to Montgomery, Alabama. The objective of the trip was to provide the participants with an opportunity to share the experience of the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice founded by Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative. Our group of 38 participants (9 men and 29 women) came from 12 congregations, ranged in age from 16 to 91 and included 23 African Americans, 1 Latina American and 14 white Americans. Our prayer was to be able to relate and communicate our shared experience and together identify ways to address those issues together.

The participants made a commitment to allow goals and actions to grow organically from the group. After three emotional days of discussion, silence, and praying together, issues were identified and three initiatives were agreed upon.

- A proposal to organize the youth of our presbytery over the next two years. The long-term vision is to build the relationships and trust to make our next DRAP trip primarily for youth and young adults.
- A proposal to organize a visible and inclusive movement around our presbytery to support DRAP initiatives within local congregations. The name of this movement would be “Presbyterians Care” and the slogan would be “Equal Justice for All God’s Children.”
- Acknowledgement, apology, and repentance for the sin of complicity in white supremacy and racism and organize actions to dismantle white privilege.

ACTIONS

1. In 2021, DRAP will organize a trip primarily for youth and young adults (ages 12-24).
 - a. DRAP team will work with the Moderator of the Presbytery’s Education/Youth Team, Ukirk, Amen House, etc.
 - i. To identify and to develop materials available to educate youth
 - ii. To create opportunities for youth to meet together quarterly for the purpose of breaking down racial barriers through education, exploration, and building trust.
 - iii. To create intergenerational educational events to educate about racism.
2. The DRAP team will lead in raising awareness of dismantling racism activities occurring throughout the Presbytery:
 - a. DRAP initiatives to congregations:
 - i. Create a litany of repentance
 - ii. Introduce and sell T-shirts (Presbyterians Care)
 - iii. Develop a Dismantling Racism and Understanding White Privilege Curriculum
 - iv. Create a narrative around the concept of “Presbyterians Care.”
 - b. DRAP will partner with Social Witness, Hunger Action, Mission Coordination, and Presbyterian Women to encourage and amplify awareness of each team’s activities to dismantle racism.

3. DRAP and Social Witness will partner to develop an annual training to be held in three locations within the Presbytery for the purpose of training congregations and new pastors in understanding white privilege and dismantling racism.

Racism is an endemic and ongoing problem in this country. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has taken productive steps to address and challenge racism and we are building on that progress. Racism is on the rise. Spokespersons for white supremacist ideology are gaining almost celebrity status by self publication of their views on social media. Some of them have held advisory positions in the highest levels of society. Violent acts of terror threaten African Americans and other people of color and have dramatically increased in number in the last year. These facts reveal an evil present in our country against which the church must take a stand, or stand for nothing. Hopefully, the question is not if, but when and how. A radical discipleship, one of courage and love, is necessary.

We prayerfully request that the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy denounce racism and white supremacy. Educating its congregations as to the grave danger these sins represent is a step in that direction. We must be fearless and proactive in our quest to end racism and bring peace and harmony to our broken world.

We recommend that the Presbytery adopt ***An Apology to Our African American Sisters and Brothers for the Sin of Slavery and Its Legacy.***

DRAP subcommittee: Bertha Larez, Ramona Williams, Rev. Dr. Junie Ewing, Julie Nicolai, Ivan Collier, Diane McCullough, Debra Yerkes, Rev. Dr. Craig Howard Presbytery Leader, Rev. Vanessa Hawkins Associate Presbytery Leader

ADDENDUM

History of Racism within the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy (St. Louis Metro and Southeast Missouri)

The rich history of St. Louis includes the heroic actions of the Underground Railroad conductors, preachers and abolitionists, freedom lawsuits, the United States Colored Troops in the Civil War and more. Let us remember forever the souls who fought to overcome racism: the Roberson Brothers, Rev. John Berry and Mary Meachum, Rev. John Anderson, Dred and Harriet Scott, Priscilla Baltimore, Annie Malone, Archer Alexander, Charlton Tandy, James Milton Turner, Peter and Nancy Jane (Rutledge) Hudlin, Fr. Moses Dickson, Caroline Quarlls, Elijah Madison, Elijah Lovejoy, William Greenleaf Eliot, Norman Seay, James Buford, Percy Green and many others.

This history of St. Louis Metro and southeast Missouri is scarred by the legacy of slavery and racism. We acknowledge that the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy has been complicit in such systemic racist decisions as supporting redlining in bank lending practice.

- In the 1946 Shelley v. Kraemer housing covenant case, Cote Brillante and the Waggoner Place Methodist Episcopal Churches helped fund the case on the Kraemer (white) side. ² When such covenants were deemed unconstitutional, white flight followed. In 1954 Cote Brillante closed and then reopened as an African American congregation on the same site.
- Third Presbyterian Church was also impacted by white flight from North St. Louis. In 1955 the church took a vote and said there were “too many Negroes moving into this community. We don't know how to minister to them and we don't want to minister to them so we vote to close.” ³
- There were over fifty dealers of enslaved people in St. Louis at one time.
- Rev. Elijah Lovejoy, for whom our Presbytery is named, paid with his life fighting for freedom of the press and ending slavery.
- The brutal burning to death of mulatto boatman, Francis McIntosh, horrified many throughout the area.
- Atrocities during the Jim Crow years were ever present. John Buckner was lynched in St. Louis County in 1894.
- The East St. Louis Race Riots in 1917, were among the worst in U.S. history. Whites rioted and killed as many as 250 African Americans and left 6,000 homeless.
- The demolition of Mill Creek Valley in 1954 for redevelopment displaced 20,000 people, 95% of them African-American.
- In modern times, the closing of Homer G. Phillips Hospital spawned protests over losing a seminal medical facility for African Americans.
- We currently live under the shadow of the Michael Brown killing and Ferguson riots, the Jason Stockley acquittal and other local shootings involving the police and African Americans.

² Rigel C. Oliveri, Setting the Stage for Ferguson: Housing Discrimination and Segregation in St. Louis, 80 MO. Law Review. (2015) Available at: <https://scholarship.law.missouri.edu/mlr/vol80/iss4/10>

³ Information received from Rev. Cedric Portis, pastor at Third Presbyterian Church. Under Rev. Portis's leadership the church has grown and is currently the Presbytery's largest growing church.

- Sundown towns, where Black people had to be out of town by sundown, were located throughout rural Illinois and Missouri.⁴
- The Ku Klux Klan has a historical and current presence in Missouri.
- The Aryan Nation headquarters are in Wood River, IL.⁵
- Hate groups are spread throughout Missouri with two located within the bounds of the Presbytery.⁶

The last lynching in Missouri occurred in 1942 in Sikeston when Cleo Wright was murdered.

⁴ Sundown Towns, Loewen

⁵ Southern Poverty Law Center

⁶ Ibid.