

Theological Background for Social Justice

Session approved February 2, 2022

As Christians, God calls us to oppose injustice. Racial injustice in our community and nation has a long history. That injustice is evident in disparities in income, education, quality of life, and safety. As the subject of those injustices, those in our community who are Black, indigenous, and other people of color bear the greatest burden, but those injustices diminish all of us.

Scripture underscores the importance of working for justice. The prophet Micah wrote, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

While all members of the PC(USA) have freedom of conscience, the work of the church in regards to injustice is clearly articulated in the confessions adopted by our denomination. One of these is the Belhar Confession, 1967, which focuses on a Christian response to racial injustice:

"We believe that God has revealed God's self as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged that God calls the church to follow God in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind; that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream; that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others."

We condemn all forms of injustice, and we work and pray for their eradication. At the same time, we recognize our own church's limitations, currently having very few members or visitors who are Black, indigenous, or people of color. Nonetheless, we intend to do what we can to ensure anyone feels welcome to worship with us. Some of those efforts are symbolic, such as hanging banners, but they are still critical in dispelling the perceptions that we serve only a narrow slice of the community. Some of those efforts involve serving side by side with community members in efforts such as food banks. Some involve funding. Some involve raising our voices to deter further injustice, and standing with others working for justice. We will do what we can.

This is not a change for us; First Presbyterian Church has been committed to racial and other justice efforts for decades. Nor is it in the least out of step with the larger PC(USA) community; among numerous efforts, our denomination has proposed legislation that calls for "a national reckoning with our legacy of systemic racism."

Following the Confession of 1967, we understand that:

To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as God's reconciling community. The life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ has set the pattern for the church's mission. His human life involves the church in the common life of all people. His service to men and women commits the church to work for every form of human well-being. His suffering makes the church sensitive to all human suffering, so that it sees the face of Christ in the faces of persons in every kind of need.

Responding to Christ's call, we pray and work for the day when all people can live, work, and worship as equals.