



Statement of Purpose

Racial Ethnic Diversity Workgroup

The Racial Ethnic Diversity Workgroup gathers to foster dialog and action around diversity in the Presbytery. Our mission is to inspire mutual affirmation of ethnicity in the Presbytery of Denver, and we work to educate and address the affliction of racism throughout our Presbytery and the church. In light of the disturbing events of Charlottesville in August, racist political movements that were represented there, and the racist responses from the upper level of the executive branch of our national government, we are issuing the following statement:

1. As we lament that our country suffers from deep racism, we turn to our faith for resistance. First of all we accept that we are a confessional church. We abide by the tenets that are accepted by the PCUSA globally and lift up those that pertain to issues the church is currently confronted with. Thus, in the Confession of 1967, we read in 9.36 that “The church accepts its role in being tested, renewed, and reformed, and to speak and act in the world’s affairs as may be appropriate to the needs of the time.”ⁱ We have not addressed our country’s ongoing systemic acceptance of all the ways racism is embedded in our corporate and individual lives and the ways we fail to love God and our neighbors.
2. We also turn to the Confession of Belhar in which we reflect on the following statements:
“We believe that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought; one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain.”ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, we reject any ideology “which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.”ⁱⁱⁱⁱ
Through study (with the aid of books like *Waking Up White*) we are learning of the history of racism in America and our own internalized racism. We must courageously proceed to unmask our prejudices.
3. Through stories of our families’ journeys to America as immigrants we both lift up our diversity and acknowledge that we are all immigrants. Our calling is to address factors where we are united and hold to those commonalities.
4. As we continue to embrace who we are collectively we must also move to educate ourselves as to how we can be more fully conscious and function equitably in our society. One of the primary ways is for us to take into consideration how our unconscious bias is borne through our language. When we name groups, as in “dominant” or “subordinate” it attributes qualities to the people contained within them, thus acknowledging a power of one over another as given. Even terms such as “liberal” or “conservative” label groups according to our prejudice. Or “evangelical.” We must recall the early Christian Church when

“there were no excluded ones, but a discipleship of equals.”^{iv} In building a world of class, race, and gender equity, it must come from this perspective.

5. Following Martin Luther King’s triumphant I Have a Dream speech in Washington in 1963, he began to turn away from the government supported alliances that were attempting to domesticate his radical message.^v He began to clarify that the challenge was broader and deeper than the voting rights bill that had been the focus of his march. To recognize the American Dream would mean to address issues that affect housing, racially-based education, hunger, jobs, “We are on the move, now,” he would say. And then his awareness broadened and deepened, adding issues of class, wealth and economic injustice to his agenda. “We must keep going,” as he imagined a multiracial and multicultural society living in harmony and justice.^{vi} He came to see that ultimately, we are all part of one another. Is this not the gospel that the apostle Paul addressed as he said, “We are all One in Christ Jesus”? (Gal 3:28) Let us keep on the move, too.

ⁱ Book of Confessions: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part 1 (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2014), The Confession of 1967, p. 292.

ⁱⁱ Book of Confessions: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part 1 (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2016), The Confession of Belhar, p. 301.

ⁱⁱⁱ Book of Confessions, p. 304.

^{iv} Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 28.

^v Vincent Harding, Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996, 2008), 48.

^{vi} Harding, 85ff.