

RACIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY

PUBLIC STATEMENT ON RACIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY

In the spirit of Christ, Govans Presbyterian Church strives to be an anti-racist church. We practice the love of Jesus in a relational ministry, and we fight for equality and equal opportunity for all people.

Definitions and assumptions that embody the work of our ministry:

- Racism is a sin, endemic within the United States and the body of the Christian church. It appears in many forms.
 - **Individual Racism** includes both prejudicial acts from a person in power of one race toward another, typically marginalized person of a different race. ¹
 - **Systemic Racism** includes ideologies within systems and organizations of power that result in and support continued unfair advantages to some people and harmful treatment of others based on race. ¹
- **Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC)** is a term recognizing that not all people of color experience the same inequities or injustices in our society. We use this term to emphasize groups most marginalized in our Church.
- **Antiracism** is active engagement in work to oppose individual and systemic racism. ^{2 3}
- While individuals can and do perform racist acts, systemic racism is more insidious and dangerous to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).
- We recognize that dismantling racism is not, and must not be, primarily the work of people of color. Govans' commitment to being anti-racist is a congregation-wide commitment, with white and BIPOC members collaborating as a team. We recognize that racism in our church and society creates severe disadvantages for non-white people, and that white people benefit from the power differentials created by those very disadvantages. Because of this, we understand that the white members of the congregation have a particular responsibility to vigilantly work to recognize, correct, and if possible, reverse the destructive and sinful effects of racism in our church and the surrounding community.

¹ Paraphrased from *So You Want to Talk about Race* by Ijeoma Oluo. 2018.

² Definition of antiracist from *How to Be An Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi: "To be antiracist is to think nothing is behaviorally wrong or right -- inferior or superior -- with any of the racial groups. Whenever the antiracist sees individuals behaving positively or negatively, the antiracist sees exactly that: individuals behaving positively or negatively, not representatives of whole races. To be antiracist is to deracialize behavior, to remove the tattooed stereotype from every racialized body. Behavior is something humans do, not races do."

³ From the Presbyterian Church Anti-racism/Racial Justice Policy Statement: "Racism is the opposite of what God intends for humanity. It is the rejection of the other, which is entirely contrary to the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ...Racism is the continuing legacy of white supremacy. Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others. It is also a lie about God, for it falsely claims that God favors parts of creation over the entirety of creation."

Why must we become an anti-racist church? We answer this question guided by perspectives of Theological and Presbyterian faith traditions.

- There are three basic tenets of the Christian faith:
 - All people are created in the image of God.
 - Jesus told us to do unto others as we would like them to do unto us; but racism does to others what we would hate done to us.
 - Jesus also said, love our neighbors, but racism inhibits the practice of love in communities ⁴
- The sin of racism causes a division between the races and marginalizes a significant portion of our population, resulting in severe and ongoing inequality between the races in education, wealth, health, income and opportunity.
- While individuals can and do perform racist acts, systemic racism is more insidious and dangerous to our society and to the Christian Church.
- According to the Presbyterian Church Anti-racism/Racial Justice Policy Statement: “Our identity [as Christians] compels us to oppose the forces of injustice. Antiracism, therefore, is prescriptive for what a faithful community must do in the quest to let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. The church must actively oppose the forces of racism in concrete and strategic ways.” ³
- “We know that all people are sacred and worthy. We are made equal by God, who created humanity in God’s own image. Out of our deep love of God and neighbor, when we see people being treated as less than equal we will speak out.”⁵
- In 1999, the 211th General Assembly declared that we will “assume an antiracist identity, provide adequate staffing and funding for implementation of the church-wide strategy for antiracism...and urge governing bodies and congregations to assume an antiracism identity, [making] available to the church training resources, which are essential for the implementation of the church-wide strategy.” (1999 Statement PCUSA).
 - We grieve that these statements and initiatives from our denomination and church have not resulted in sustained action.
 - Therefore, we conclude that now is the time to act rather than analyze and in a spirit of repentance Govans Presbyterian Church seeks to become an antiracist church.

Particular Actions our church is taking to make Govans Presbyterian Church an anti-racist church:

- Showing the level of commitment in a financial and practical way, the Session established Racial Justice as a dedicated ministry of the church and Committee

⁴ Paraphrased from *Presbyterian Today* article titled “Antiracism work is heart work”—2021. Available [here](#).

⁵ Quoted directly from *Commit to Becoming an Antiracist Church* on The United Methodist Church Website, Available [here](#).

of Session (not simply a program); this ministry is financially supported by hiring a Minister of Racial Justice (January 2021).

- We formed a Racial Justice Ministry Working Group which includes church members as well as members from broader community
- We are educating ourselves and offering opportunities to the congregation and community to join in this education. (Book Groups, Racial Justice Speakers Series)
- We are engaging with the community around racial issues (Storytelling, Movie Nights, Open Space Conversations).
- We are currently forming antiracist policies on hiring, contracting and other employment issues, to become anti-racist and to encourage BIPOC to apply for open positions at any level within our church organization.
- We are in contact with other denominations and other PCUSA congregations that have taken on the difficult, ongoing work of pursuing racial justice to learn from their triumphs and mistakes
- We are interviewing older Govans and former Brown Memorial parishioners to learn from our past mistakes and successes within living memory, and the effects of policies and pastors from our past on the Govans' neighborhood
- We are preparing a short questionnaire to assess church members who are not formally interviewed to learn their perspectives on racial justice, our church history and more
- We will be using Adult Options and other church forums to explain the history of Govans' involvement in fighting for (and impeding) civil rights, so we can learn how to proceed, especially within the Presbytery's Matthew 25 initiative.