



September 1, 2020

Dear FCPC Family,

As Christians, we live our faith “between the word and the world, with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.”<sup>1</sup> As followers of Jesus, we are called to embody God’s love and justice in the world.

At this time in history, it is our responsibility to publicly and explicitly stand in solidarity with others against injustice, aggression, and hate, recognizing that racism is not new. We also seek opportunities to humbly learn, pray, and seek justice, always pointing to the resurrection hope we find in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We take this stand, not on the basis of political correctness or partisan ideology, but on the basis of scripture itself and the Confessions that guide the Presbyterian Church (USA). Most importantly, we take this stand on the basis of the Confession of Belhar, written in the midst of the Church Struggle against Apartheid in South Africa, and adopted by the PC(USA) in 2016.

The Belhar Confession<sup>2</sup> rejected the racism of Apartheid on the basis of scripture’s call to Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice. With the Christians of South Africa, and with other Presbyterians in America, we affirm these words of the Belhar Confession:

We believe that *unity* is both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain.

We believe that this *unity* must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity, and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.

We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of *reconciliation* in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker; that God’s life giving Word and Spirit will enable the Church to live in a new obedience which can open up new possibilities of life for society and the world.

We believe that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity.

We believe that God has revealed Godself 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth

<sup>2</sup> Confession of Belhar, Dutch Reformed Mission Church, South Africa 2016, prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church USA.

We believe that God calls the church to follow Godself in this; that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right; 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; 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.

In addition to the Belhar Confession, we look to Scripture for guidance, wisdom, and accountability:

1. We call upon the words of Paul, who wrote to the church in Ephesus about unity, especially our unity as fellow citizens, bound together through our faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:19). Paul teaches us to "be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" and to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:2-3). This affects not just the work and ministry of our particular congregation, but our collaborations with other churches and community leaders.

2. Our faith history guides us to remember the words of the prophets, particularly Isaiah's declaration that our Lord is a "God of justice" (Isa 30:18). The Lord also spoke through Amos, saying, "but let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). As people made in the image of God, we are created to pray for and pursue justice for all people, assured of a promised and coming righteousness on earth because of God's holiness, grace, and love.

3. Lastly, we ultimately point to the words and actions of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who taught us to "love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Matt 22:39). Throughout his life, Jesus stood against racism and discrimination in all forms--healing divisions, advocating for the oppressed, confronting systemic powers, and ultimately giving his life as a sacrifice and a bold act of love. May the Scriptures lead us to "act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8), continually seeking to share the love and light of Christ through all we say and do.

4. "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:23-28).

In response to the call of scripture and the Belhar Confession, we have identified the following immediate actions as we start our journey:

1. Instate the Peace and Justice Ministry Mission Subcommittee
2. Convene with other congregations as part of an on-going conversation about unity, reconciliation, and justice that includes youth as active participants and leaders.
3. Participate, as a congregation, the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN), whose work is committed to drawing together people to act powerfully on local and regional issues of justice and fairness. PIIN is a community of people of faith from the Pittsburgh region, including churches across southwestern Pennsylvania from the South Hills to the Northside. Their mission is to effect systemic change on issues of injustice, disparity, and discrimination. They recognize "positive social change specifically from an organized faith community has formed the backbone of some of the most powerful social rights movements in this country (such as Abolition, Suffrage, and the Civil Rights Movement).

FCPC is committed to a mission of unity, reconciliation and justice where all members of our community can thrive. We embrace the progress made to date and our continuing journey with God and neighbor toward a more faithful church and a more just society. As this work continues, we welcome your feedback and guidance, as well as your participation and leadership.

Prayerfully Submitted,

The Peace and Justice Ministry Mission Subcommittee

For further reference, please follow the link below:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/facing-racism-vision-intercultural-community-antiracism-study-guides/>