

Presbytery of Tampa Bay Antiracism Policy

INTRODUCTION

The policy builds upon the **work of the Racial Equity Task Force (RETF), the Confession of Belhar,¹ the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s 2016 Antiracism Policy², and the Matthew 25 initiatives of the PC(USA) and the Presbytery of Tampa Bay (PTB), Florida.** ³ This document highlights why we have an antiracism policy, who is responsible for administering it and how it may be implemented through procedures currently being developed. **Section 1, Biblical and Theological Basis**, grounds our policy in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and in our faith commitments; **Section 2, Implementation Responsibilities**, summarizes the roles of the Coordinating Team (CT), the Committee on Racial Equity (CoRE) and other authorized persons; and **Section 3** features two basic **Guidelines, historical accuracy and engaging the heart.**

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS

a. SUMMARY OF BIBLICAL BASIS

Genesis 1:27-28, NRSV: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

It is the collective whole of humanity that God commanded to be caretakers and stewards of His creation, not to have dominion over one another within humanity.

Galatians 3:26-28, NRSV: “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”

Through faith, we have become children of God, and therefore have a new spiritual identity as one family in Christ Jesus. This identity goes beyond the grave and solidifies our everlasting oneness in Christ as members of the family of God.

b. SUMMARY OF THEOLOGICAL BASIS

I John 4:7-8, NRSV: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are taught through the gospels and epistles to love one another. One who loves another person does the person no harm, does not subjugate, enslave or mistreat the person, but rather seeks to benefit the person.

¹ https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/the_belhar_confession-rogers.pdf

² *Fighting Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community, a churchwide antiracism policy approved by the 222nd General Assembly (2016).* Available at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/facing-racism-vision-intercultural-community-churchwide-antiracism-policy/>. The policy further describes a seven-fold strategy that involves all levels of the church beginning on page 17 of the document

³ <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/matthew-25-program-and-mission-quick-links/>

I Corinthians 13:4-8a, NRSV: “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.”

History reveals humanity’s failure to love as God commands. United States history includes multi-generational enslavement of African Americans, in addition to the slaughter, unjust incarceration and segregation of Indigenous, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Hispanic American and Latinx peoples in the United States. This brutal inhumanity has been conducted by people who self-identify as Christians, as well as those who don’t. Because such inhumane treatment has become institutionalized in our nation, there is a responsibility for Christians to dismantle the frameworks within which systemic racism is sustained. As people who love, Christians are compelled to create an environment in which authentic love for everyone can flourish, manifesting itself in a culture of equity and mutual benefit.

Mark 1:8, NRSV: “I [John the Baptist] have baptized you with water; but he [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance wherein people confessed and repented of their sins. The water of this baptism symbolized what Jesus would fulfill in his death and resurrection: the cleansing away of sin from those who repent. At Pentecost, Jesus introduced a greater baptism, a spiritual rebirth: the Holy Spirit of God *transforming* human beings into members of the family of God. Those who receive this baptism become new creatures in Christ Jesus and are forever changed into the image of Christ. Therefore, all sin, including the sin of racism, decreases until it becomes a thing of the past. This is the work of God's Holy Spirit. Without this fundamental transformation, people find it difficult to change.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. This policy shall be distributed by way of regular presbytery communication channels (Manual of Operations, stated meetings, e-news, etc.).
2. Teaching Elders (TE), Certified Christian Educators (CCE), Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE) and presbytery staff are required to participate in antiracism training and practices.
3. Racial Equity training is required no less than once every three years for:
 - a) Teaching Elders serving in or seeking installed or temporary pastoral relationships with congregations or otherwise engaged in a validated ministry within the bounds of The Presbytery of Tampa Bay,
 - b) Retired teaching elders engaged in any pastoral ministry, including pulpit supply,
 - c) Commissioned Ruling Elders actively serving a congregation,
 - d) Certified Christian Educators,
 - e) Members-At-Large, and
 - f) Presbytery Staff.
4. Racial equity training is strongly encouraged for Retired Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, presbytery committee and task force members and other persons representing the presbytery, inquirers and candidates for ministry under care of the presbytery, members of individual sessions and church staffs within the presbytery, and any other leaders within the church.
5. Upon adoption of this antiracism policy, those required to receive training shall have three years to complete the requisite training or an approved alternate, as determined by the CoRE. Those entering

the presbytery, whether as a Teaching Elder, Presbytery Staff, or other designated position for whom racial equity training is required, shall complete the requisite training within one year of their date of hire/start of call.

The Committee on Racial Equity (CoRE) will have the overall responsibility for helping the presbytery in living into this policy as outlined above, including the following particular responsibilities for administration of this policy, including consultation, data compilation, guidance and reporting on progress in meeting the requirements of this policy to all appropriate entities:

1. Coordinate racial equity training at least twice per year. (For those unable to attend scheduled training, alternate training may be permitted with prior approval by CoRE).
2. Assist congregations to develop antiracism policies in accordance with meeting the requirement in the PCUSA Book of Order (G-3.0106) that “all councils shall adopt and implement an antiracism policy.”
3. Recognize and celebrate antiracism accomplishments through presbytery newsletters, presbytery meetings, retreats, conferences, public forums, social media and other appropriate methods; and
4. Aid and strongly encourage congregations to ensure that antiracism guidelines are being met.
5. Support, provide and promote opportunities for educational, training and networking programs focused on racial healing and antiracism action;

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

- A. **Historical Accuracy** – The CoRE will evaluate all programs, resources and trainers to ensure historical accuracy. To help promote racial healing and the dismantling of racism, CoRE will provide regularly updated lists of recommended resources that are historically and psychologically accurate, timely and appropriately vetted for authenticity. Topics will include (but not be limited to) the history of racism and current conditions of African Americans and People of Color including Indigenous, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Hispanic American and Latinx persons. Perspectives will include their contributions to the vitality of the United States, e.g., in faith communities, community-building, education, medicine, innovation, entrepreneurship, scientific discoveries, government, political action, military, sports, music, art. All recommended resources will be regularly reviewed for authenticity and historical accuracy.
- B. **Engaging the Heart** - Acknowledge that this effort will call for Engaging the Heart. CoRE asserts that the first priority of antiracism work is doing the personal inner work to heal from emotional and physical harms resulting from being infected or affected by systemic racism and to prevent further harm. Ongoing healing often takes time, honesty, processing, courage, faith, grief, community and the reassurance of God’s mercy and healing. CoRE will encourage and support participants to pursue racial understanding, growth opportunities and direct (self-initiated or community) action for racial healing throughout the Presbytery and beyond.