



BIBLICAL-WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF ANTI-RACISM WORK

CREATED BY THE CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE DEPARTMENT

PURPOSE

This is a working document to serve as the underpinning lens to using the anti-racism books, videos, and articles curated for the Great Plains Conference churches and mission field.

The Kingdom of God

The work of anti-racism is a work of discipleship responding to Jesus' call to build the Kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven. Every Sunday morning, the people called Methodists pray the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in Heaven,
Hallowed by thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,
On Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen

This beloved shared prayer is based off Jesus' own words that appear in both Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. Each time we pray these words, we reaffirm the vision that God's will shall be on earth as it is in heaven, and we accept God's beckoning to live as citizens of this Kingdom, in which Jesus is Lord. Prior to his ascension, Jesus commissioned his followers to go to the ends of the earth to make disciples of all people, all nations, all skin tones. Jesus beckons the Church to reflect the Kingdom of God in all its beauty and diversity. As a result, the Christian church is invited to mirror the racially integrated nature of the Kingdom through our work of ministry and mission in the Great Plains Conference.

Framework and Assumption

The work of anti-racism assumes that Great Plains United Methodists are people called by God, transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and disciplined in the ways of Jesus Christ; as a result, we are followers of Jesus committed, as it is stated in our baptismal vows, "to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves." We believe that the work of interrupting racist ideas and behaviors and dismantling racist policies is doable, and we are part of God's plan to end the sin of racism among us. Everyone is an important part of this work, and together we are the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27), united in our diversity against racism.

Diversity has always been part of God's vision for the Kingdom. God created all of humanity in God's own image (Gen. 1:27) then commissioned them to fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). God chose Abraham and his family to bless the entire world (Gen. 22:18). This blessing transcends race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, and other

markers which we use to divide ourselves. Our human response to this blessing is a celebration of our diversity, recognizing the beauty of creation in all its forms, and to embrace that diversity as a reflection of God's own self. This is true in our Savior Jesus' lineage. In Matthew's gospel, the evangelist points us to a background of diverse ancestry of Jesus with the inclusion of Gentile women such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba (Matt.1). This underscores the theme that at the core of God's plan for salvation and kingdom living, is a faith whose existence is inseparable from its diversity.

Biblical Foundation of Anti-racism Work

Inspired by the biblical witness, the Kingdom of God we are invited to be a part of and to build alongside other disciples is one that celebrates our human diversity and rejects any form of division, hatred and oppression based on our shades of skin or any outward appearance that might divide us, as articulated in Galatians:

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:25-28).

United Methodist Social Teaching on Racism

The Social Principles is a call to use our faith in Jesus Christ to make a difference in the world by reclaiming our prophetic voice whereby giving a different vision of the world that is rooted in God's Kingdom, which is life-giving and compassionate. This is an urgent call, especially in this season and context where the world looks to the church for leadership. A call birthed in the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ as the words from John reminds us: "Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other" (Jn. 13:34-35).

Further, the United Methodist Book of Discipline affirms that "all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God." (BOD, ¶161 G). The ideal of treating every person as God's image bearer, is the core of our doctrine of creation, which proclaims that all human beings bear the hallmark of the Creator and as children of God are sisters and brothers to one another. Therefore, racism goes against God's vision for humanity, it denies all persons to celebrate their God-given rights and dignity.

Rejection of Racism

Because racism dehumanizes and harms God's beloved children, it prevents followers of Jesus Christ to fulfill the mission of building a beloved community here on earth mirroring the kingdom of God. We join all United Methodists in our baptismal commitment to "resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves." Therefore,

We condemn racism, ethnocentrism, tribalism, and any ideology or social practice based on false and misleading beliefs or ideologies that one group of human beings is superior to all other groups of human beings. Additionally, we utterly reject laws, policies and social practices that marginalize, discriminate and/or encourage the use of violence against individuals, communities or other social groups based on perceived racial, ethnic or tribal differences. We call on congregations and on pastors, bishops, and other church authorities to educate themselves about the root causes and manifestations of racism, ethnocentrism, and tribalism within communities of faith and to develop strategies for overcoming these kinds of social divisions. We likewise urge governments, businesses, and civil society organizations to renounce statements, policies, and actions aimed at promoting exclusion, discrimination and violence, (SP 2020, 29).

Confession

As followers of Christ, we confess our neglect to end the sin of racism and seek God's graciousness and forgiveness:

Created in God's image to live in covenant with God and the world, we honor the dignity of all beings and affirm the goodness of life. Knowing that we are held in God's grace, we are able to confess our sins. We have failed to love God with our whole hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We have participated in unjust and life-destroying social systems...Further, we have not followed Jesus Christ in sharing God's extravagant love and ministering with "the least of these" (Matt. 25:45) We have closed ourselves to God's guiding Spirit in our daily interactions with the human family and the earth. We have fallen short, and yet God loves us still (SP 2020, 6).

Through baptism, Christ adopts us into God's universal family, and invites us to partake in God's communion with saints like us and those different than us as a sign of God's reconciling work among and within us. Just as we are nourished by physical food, at God's kingdom table, we are nourished spiritually and commissioned into the world to bear witness to the message of hope, faith and love.

The Great Plains Conference's Call to Doing Justice Work

In the Old and New Testaments, we hear God's call for us to do justice (Mic. 6:8), to repair and heal brokenness in our communities (Is. 58, 61), and to love one another (Jn. 15); the prophets continually denounce social injustice and oppression by loosening the chains of injustice and untying the cords of the yoke, setting the oppressed free and breaking every yoke (Is. 58:6); following the scriptural mandates and our United Methodist social teaching examples, the Great Plains Conference invites all our leaders, clergy and laity, and all Christians called United Methodists in Kansas and Nebraska, to engage in this discipleship work, moving our people from a **NOT RACIST** posture to being **ANTI-RACIST** believers as we unite to multiply anti-racist disciples and churches by interrupting and dismantling racism wherever we encounter it.

We know that doing justice is a collaborative work, and it is challenging work. However, we lean in the power of the Holy Spirit who gives us gifts and the means to respond faithfully to this challenging work. God's call for the church is a call to difficult work, but it is also a call where Jesus Christ empowers us and gives us direction to fulfill the requirement of "doing justice, and loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God" (Mic. 6:8).

We encourage United Methodists in Kansas and Nebraska as you digest all the anti-racist resources in our website, to do so recognizing that as people of faith we have a unique position to inject into anti-racism conversation honesty, compassion, grace and love, doing all this by reclaiming our John Wesley's General Rules to "Do No Harm, Do Good, and Follow the Ordinances of God."

Finally, our anti-racism work is a response to God's call to follow Jesus Christ and usher in the kingdom of God so that all persons may live abundant life (Jn. 10:10). "We respond to God's call in the world by giving witness to the transformative power of the Gospel, engaging in acts of mercy, and striving toward the attainment of justice and peace as hallmarks of God's coming reign... (Revised SP 2020, 21).

Resources

The following resources serve as beginning points to aid individuals and churches in their growth journey toward anti-racism. This is a process, not a quick fix, that requires discernment, prayer, and time to process concepts and next steps.

The books, videos, and articles highlighted on the Great Plains Conference website are not necessarily a theological blueprint. However, as United Methodists, the Biblical and Wesleyan theological underpinnings of our call to antiracist discipleship rely on the Wesleyan Quadrilateral – scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. As you engage with the resources provided, we invite you to employ the Biblical and Wesleyan Theological framework in your discernment journey to becoming Anti-racist disciples and congregations.

Great Plains Conference Resources:

<https://www.greatplainsumc.org/racial-justice>

<https://www.greatplainsumc.org/learning-to-be-anti-racist>

General Commission on Religion and Race Resources:

<https://www.gcorr.org/30-days-of-anti-racism/>

<https://www.gcorr.org/overt-and-covert-racism/>

Revised Social Principles Draft:

<https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/124>

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