

Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ (PNC-UCC)

Letter on Racism to the Wider Church

October 2020

Dear Members of the United Church of Christ:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ.

In August the National Setting of the UCC committed to hire a consulting firm to lead them through “an objective racial equity assessment” to hold the national setting of the church accountable to the ideals the church has espoused regarding racial equality and inclusion.

We recognize that the history of the UCC includes a wide array of narratives: those of myriad immigrants, formerly enslaved persons, colonists, indigenous communities, and more. Our predecessor bodies included abolitionists as well as slave owners; those who believed that racial inequality was established by God, and those who affirmed God-given racial equality with passion and fervor. Our predecessor bodies included those who pressed for the forced assimilation of indigenous peoples as well as those who stood in solidarity with and advocated on behalf of indigenous people. Our history contains the very best of American history regarding racial equality and it contains some of the worst. As a body made up of myriad traditions, theologies, languages, and geographies, our predecessor bodies reflected the society and time around them. Yet out of that complexity and contention arose something new: a movement of unity in the face of difference, our United Church of Christ.

The tragic events we have witnessed in 2020 have magnified awareness of the disparities in our church and society based on race. The Council of Conference Ministers affirms the commitment of the national setting to racial equality and inclusion and recognizes the need to engage in our own process of critical self-reflection. Therefore, in this moment, the Council of Conference Ministers invites the congregations and members of our conferences to recognize and affirm our call to:

- Consider anew how racism has divided us, damaged and at times destroyed our siblings in Christ, and broken the bonds of peace;
- Ask for forgiveness for our silence in the face of racial injustice;
- Take responsibility for our part in the struggle for racial justice;
- Recognize the political, theological and spiritual diversity of our congregations and to heed the great commandment of Matthew 22:37 to love God with all our souls and with all our minds and to love our neighbors as ourselves;
- Witness to the transforming power of Jesus Christ by engaging in deep self-reflection to “remove the log from our own eye” (Matthew 7:5) so that we may become more aware of our own racism and repent of it;
- Build processes of racial inclusion and equity in church membership, leadership, and service; and
- Engage in the sacred work of dismantling racist structures and white supremacy where we find them in the church and the community.

As Conference Ministers, we are on this journey with you; and will facilitate and support this work by providing resources that will enable reflection, dialog and action in addressing systems of institutional racism and white supremacy. The reflection and engagement will be different in each conference depending on its unique histories and narratives.

Our covenant is that we will move into self-reflection and clear-eyed conversations with open hearts to hear one another without fear or judgment. We understand that talking about racism, white supremacy and privilege in the church is difficult. However, due to our shared commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in response to God's invitation to unity, we are empowered to engage in these daunting and uncomfortable conversations. May we do so, as we are led by the Holy Spirit as God's people.

With Grace and Gratitude,

The Council of Conferences Ministers
United Church of Christ
September 2020