



THE PRESBYTERY OF SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND

Antiracism Policy

Preface

In 2022, the General Assembly sent an overture to the Presbyteries for vote [**All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy and a child and youth protection policy, and an antiracism policy with suggested training for all members of each council**] which was passed in the affirmative nationwide. This was from an overture from the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley, Item [02-137](#) which was deferred to the 2022 Assembly from the 2020 Assembly. ***This is now reflected in the requirement that each council of the Presbyterian Church (USA) have an antiracism policy, per G-3.0106 as of July 13, 2023.***

As the Presbytery of Southern New England we welcome this change in our Book of Order as it reflects work we have been seeking to do for many years. In 2018, the Presbytery Roundtable and Mission and Vision Team discerned that our presbytery was being called to explore our relationship to antiracism and seek to disrupt and dismantle racism within our bounds. In March of 2019, the Presbytery Roundtable invited Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training to come lead a three day retreat with all Presbytery leadership at Stony Point Retreat Center. That retreat was very well received and prompted the presbytery to contract Crossroads as consultants to PSNE. Through this contract Crossroads began providing regular coaching to the General Presbyter and Stated Clerk, Roundtable, and follow-up work with the leaders who attended the retreat in March of 2019.

After taking time to discern the best way forward to continue our call to dismantle racism and become a more antiracist community and institution, the Presbytery formed the PSNE Antiracism and Equity Team, which continues to serve the Presbytery today. The Antiracism and Equity Team was charged with the mandate: “To work towards the creation of an inclusive, equitable, antiracist culture within the PSNE that will be attractive to all people in particular those who have been systematically excluded from full participation in the presbytery, as we seek to be co-creators with Christ of a just, peaceful and healed world/creation.”

Since its creation, the Antiracism and Equity Team has met monthly for personal growth in antiracism as a way of being, and to explore and implement ways to engage the Presbytery and member churches in antiracism as a way of being.. Through the work of the Antiracism and Equity Team, the Presbytery has offered a number of in-person and online training, book studies, Presbytery worship leadership, and personal consulting to members of the Presbytery. To name a few, the Antiracism and Equity Team has hosted:

- Book Study facilitated by Executive Presbyter Shannan Vance-Ocampo (Summer 2020)
 - *The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias* by Dolly Chugh
- Book Study facilitated in small groups over Zoom by Antiracism and Equity Team (Summer 2021)
 - *Waking up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* by Debby Irving
 - *White Awake: An Honest Look at What it Means to Be White* by Daniel Hill
- Presbytery worship and workshops
- PSNE Leadership Retreat at Westminster Presbyterian Church facilitated by Crossroads (June 3-4, 2022)
- All Presbytery Antiracism Webinar Series co-facilitated by Crossroads and the PSNE Antiracism and Equity Team (Fall 2022)
 - Session 1: What is antiracism and what does it require of us?
 - Session 2: Understanding White Supremacy
 - Session 3: Why must antiracism work be intersectional?
 - Session 4: How do racism and white supremacy generate covert barriers to antiracism work?
- All Presbytery Monthly Training and Discussion with People of Color and People of White cohorts – facilitated by Crossroads and PSNE Antiracism and Equity Team (Spring 2023 - Winter 2024)

Out of the initial retreat and the beginnings of our work, some of our committees and teams of the Presbytery have begun to take steps around their particular work as it relates to the work of antiracism. These are the beginning steps, and we are committed to continuing to grow in these specific ways as well, using the continuum from Crossroads to guide us in our committee and team work.

These trainings have served to open the hearts and minds of our Presbytery to rethink our relationship to racism and how we as Christians are called to help dismantle. We see this work as a part of our call as Christians broadly and Presbyterians specifically. We look forward to following where God will lead us in the coming years as we continue to seek to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8).

We hope that through this policy we can solidify why we are called to help end racism and how we are committed to engaging in antiracism as a way of being within our Presbytery.

Antiracism Policy of the Presbytery of Southern New England

As a Presbytery, four core principles *affirm our calling into this work*.

- God created all of creation and called it “good.” Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.” This is the primary identifying characteristic that every human being shares: made good in the image of God – various and diverse in all kinds of ways, and yet also one. As Christians, we seek to honor this goodness and protect the inherent value and worth of all living things.
- Jesus told his followers that the two most important commandments are: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And the second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no greater commandment than these.” As Christians we are therefore deeply committed to loving one another in word and deed.
- We affirm that racism in all forms is a sin. Racism disrupts our relationship with one another. It emerges in individual and systemic ways and harms God’s beloved. Both those who are victims of racism and those who perpetuate the harm are injured, though the harm is different and not the same and the remedies for each need a different cure. As Christians who seek to follow the way of Christ who was without sin, we commit ourselves to continually repent and turn toward Christ and the way of Christ. We will not always get it right, but we are deeply committed to dismantling racism and liberating ourselves and all of creation from the harm of racism in our communities. In light of this, we commit ourselves to “A new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of [our] institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God’s activity in the world.” (F-1.0404)
- Jesus came to liberate creation from the ways of sin and oppression. Jesus embodies all that is good, all that is just, all that is merciful, all that is righteous. “In Christ there is a new creation, the old things have passed away, a new life has begun” (2 Corinthians 5:17). As Presbyterians, we seek to help further new life and exhibit the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. As our Book of Order compels us, “The Church bears witness in word and work that in Christ the new creation has begun, and that God who creates life also frees those in bondage, forgives sin, reconciles brokenness, makes all things

new, and is still at work in the world. To be members of the body of Christ is to be sent out to pursue the mission of God and to participate in God's new creation, God's kingdom drawing the present into itself." (F-1.0302 d) We embrace that we can live into the mission of the church by seeking to "participat[e] in God's mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely, to free people from sin, suffering and oppression; and to establish Christ's just, loving and peaceable rule in the world." (F-1.0302 d) Dismantling racism and creating antiracist ways of being within our communities and institutions are critical ways we can live into this mission of the church.

These core principles root us in a deep commitment to dismantle racism in all its forms and further the flourishing of all of God's beloved creation.

In naming our commitment, we must also acknowledge that many of our Christian ancestors - *and we ourselves* - have furthered the harm of racism and strayed from God's good way. While the details of racism in each location are different, each of our communities have their own histories to reckon with. Our particular geography has been home to the expulsion of Native American populations from their land, genocide, slave ports, voter suppression, red lining, segregation, xenophobia, police brutality, and housing discrimination. The echoes and impacts of racist policies and laws are active in our lives today. We are a learning community and are committed to continuing to grow in our understanding of our geographies and intertwined histories.

It is our Christian call to do what we can to learn our histories and actively seek to repair harms done. At its heart, the work of antiracism is about the fullness and wholeness of Creation. While our "ministry" may be particular, the reparative work before us is nothing short of the full restoration of Creation, which we understand to be God's first gift.

Our Commitments

The Presbytery makes a commitment to offer, provide resources for, and publicize educational opportunities that focus on dismantling racism within ourselves, our church institutions (both the Presbytery and congregations) and the communities we serve.

We will continue our practice of land acknowledgements, which are offered prior to every stated meeting of the Presbytery by the local congregation who is serving as host. These have been most effective when done with historical, theological and cultural significance for learning about the history of our communities.

Training Requirements

The Presbytery will provide an annual antiracism training. We will seek to offer trainings that are both didactic and experiential. The contents of the trainings will vary year to year depending on the needs of our community. We will seek to incorporate the following elements and concepts:

- A theological grounding for our work to further antiracism
- Our particular local New England history, including Presbyterian church history, and the [Doctrine of Discovery](#)
- Core concepts of systemic racism and its manifestation at the individual level
- An awareness of the impact of church policies and decisions on people of color and marginalized communities
- Tools and strategies to develop antiracist behavior and culture within our church life

We will also ensure that the leadership training we offer annually to those called to chair committees and teams of the Presbytery equips leaders to appropriately lead diverse communities and interrupt ongoing racialized practices of the Presbytery.

Participation

Members of the Presbytery and other designated individuals outlined below agree to complete at least one day of training (or its equivalent) every three years. It is strongly encouraged that if someone is new to the Presbytery or service in the Presbytery this be completed during their first year. This requirement applies to the following groups and individuals: teaching elders in active ministry service, leaders of new worshipping communities, elders serving in the Presbytery, Presbytery staff, commissioned ruling elders serving congregations, and inquirers and candidates under care of the Presbytery.

Members of PSNE congregations and ministries are welcome and encouraged to participate in antiracism training of the Presbytery. All events will be publicized throughout the Presbytery with open enrollment.

Training Administration & Oversight

This policy will be administered by the Presbytery Roundtable who provides oversight of the Antiracism and Equity Team and authorizes the hiring of training consultants. The Roundtable is responsible for reviewing follow-up reports from training participants and evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the training.

Conclusion

We commit to a cycle of engagement with this policy every three years with leadership from the Antiracism and Equity Team of the Presbytery. Changes to this policy can be made by a majority vote of the Presbytery.

As Presbyterians, we are rooted in the idea that we are to be “*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*,” that is, “the church reformed, always being reformed.” We believe that Christ is not done with us yet. We have more to learn and more good news to share in our journey of following Christ. With trust in all that God has left to do, we seek wholeheartedly to join Christ in furthering the good news of the kingdom of God. In big ways and small, we are working to dismantle racism in our midst, and so further the good news of the justice, mercy, peace, and love of Christ.

Draft, First Reading