

City Reformed Presbyterian Church
Plan for Racial Reconciliation
10/4/2016

This past summer the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America passed Overture 43, which was a statement of repentance regarding matters of racial injustice. The session of City Reformed Presbyterian Church receives this statement with wholehearted affirmation as a necessary expression of our corporate repentance. (See Appendix A.) We grieve the long history of racial injustice in our nation. We grieve the remaining sin in our own hearts which can cause us to sin against our brothers and sisters from different ethnic traditions. We believe that it is important to acknowledge our connection to historic racial sins, and we seek ongoing repentance that we might “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3). In addition to repentance, we also recognize the need for particular steps of action which are a “fruit of repentance” (Matthew 3:8, James 2:26). City Reformed Presbyterian Church commits to the following courses of action as a means of pursuing racial reconciliation.

Overview

Despite the many years that have passed since the Civil Rights Movement, America still experiences the effects of centuries of racial oppression. Slavery and segregation have left their mark throughout America. In 2016, urban poverty corresponds strongly with race, and this is especially true in Pittsburgh. Family break-down, poverty, crime, and mass incarceration remain troubling issues throughout American culture and particularly among many inner-city African-American communities. The past two years have been filled with intense conflict surrounding police and their relationship to the black community. This conflict reveals that Americans are still deeply divided along racial lines and uncertain about what steps to take to remedy the conflicts.

The American church mirrors many aspects of our culture in its separation by race. Tragically, the separation of black and white Christians into largely distinct congregations does not allow the Christian community to offer a redemptive word in the midst of our current conflict. We have a past marked by oppression and a present marked by division. This stands in contrast to the clear commands of Scripture in which the church is called to be a visible display of brotherly love and reconciliation. The Apostle Paul presents the church as a community of diverse people who demonstrate the power of the Gospel as their interpersonal relationships transcend cultural and racial divisions (Ephesians 3:8-10, Galatians 3:27-29). Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another and declared that the world would see the ministry of Jesus through the oneness of his church (John 17:20-21).

We recognize that some churches have historically addressed matters of social concern and church unity as part of a theological movement known as the “social gospel.” The social gospel often emphasized the transformation of society but failed to embrace historic Christian doctrines. On other occasions, concern for so-called “social issues” has led to a transgression of the proper sphere of influence of the church. Both conservative and progressive political aims have sometimes dominated the life of the church and eclipsed other central Christian concerns. With these pitfalls in mind, we affirm that the

following commitments are necessary to the call of the gospel and are not opposed to it. We do not believe that a concern for racial reconciliation is a departure from biblical doctrine, nor does it diminish the necessity of proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus and the Christian response of repentance, faith and obedience. On the contrary, historic failures to address racial injustice and our current racial separation have created significant barriers for the proclamation of the gospel in our time.

Because American history was shaped by intentional racially motivated sins such as kidnapping, slavery, segregation, and oppression, intentional actions are required to remedy the situation. Generally, the church should be guided in this endeavor by our call to love our brothers and sisters in Christ (I John 3:23) and to love our neighbor (Luke 10:37). Specifically, the action of the 2016 General Assembly of the PCA calls our church to seek racial reconciliation. In response to the general call of Christ and the specific call of Overture 43, City Reformed commits itself to action in the following four areas. In a separate appendix we will list the specific ways in which we are currently seeking to pursue these goals. The specifics will change, and we are particularly interested in input from our congregation on these steps, but we wanted to highlight the practical ways that this commitment can shape our ministry.

Commitments

We commit ourselves to the pursuit of racial reconciliation as a natural and necessary component of our obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

1.) We will seek racial reconciliation by pursuing a more racially diverse congregation, with particular reference to the inclusion of African Americans.

We will:

- a. Intentionally seek to benefit from the public ministry gifts of African Americans in our denomination and from other Bible-believing congregations.
- b. Promote educational activities which enhance our congregational awareness of issues related to racial reconciliation.
- c. Seek to become an increasingly welcoming community for our African-American neighbors.
- d. Understand ways in which we may cause unnecessary barriers for participation from African-American Christians in our community and seek to alleviate those barriers where possible.

Comments:

We are thankful for the many Africans and African Americans who are and have been members of City Reformed. Their presence has been a gift to our congregation and has already served to heighten our awareness and stimulated us all to a greater love for unity. As we consider seeking greater racial and ethnic unity, we are committed to doing this without exceeding the boundaries of proper church authority or compromising doctrinal truth. We believe that the goal of racial reconciliation is central to the gospel and does not require compromise nor hinder our goal to be faithful witnesses in the university community of Pittsburgh. Rather, serious efforts towards racial reconciliation are necessary to our obedient discipleship in the city of Pittsburgh.

2.) We will seek racial reconciliation by pursuing appropriate ministry partnerships with African-American churches in our city.

We will:

- a. Continue to cultivate ministry relationships with African-American churches that affirm the inspiration of Scripture and historic Christian faith.
- b. Prayerfully consider support for multi-ethnic church plants where they are needed.

Comments:

We recognize that these goals will sometimes require a willingness to stretch our comfort zones and to relinquish control in some ministry situations. We entrust ourselves to the active presence of the Holy Spirit as we hold tightly to both truth and grace.

3.) We will seek racial reconciliation by supporting the development of African-American pastors.

- a. The PCA requires a seminary education that is both expensive and time consuming. Some possible candidates for ministry in the black community lack the resources to pursue this type of training. We commit to providing financial support for African-American candidates for ministry in the PCA.

Comments:

Encouraging the presence of black pastors is necessary to increase diversity within our denomination. Greater racial diversity in our denomination is not the only goal (see commitments #2 and #4). However, it is a legitimate goal and we believe intentional steps are required to move towards this goal. We do not believe that blind neutrality is necessary when pursuing the goal of greater racial diversity. Because our current situation is caused by intentional sinful actions which have brought ongoing racial separation, we believe that intentional actions are required to begin remedying the situation. For that reason, we believe that it is necessary to allot some scholarship money that could be directed to potential pastors from the African-American community.

Over the years, City Reformed has supported pastoral development for many future pastors who had natural connections to our church, and that will continue. This fund will allow us to intentionally direct some funds to support pastors who are not part of our community, but who help us pursue this goal. The presence of many African-American students at RPTS (a local Reformed seminary) and the collaborative efforts of networks in our denomination will make this goal reasonable.

4.) We will seek racial reconciliation by investing energy in service ministry to our neighbors.

- a. We will work through partnerships with appropriate ministries to serve our neighbors.
- b. We will seek to form a consistent presence of love and service in our neighboring communities.

Comments:

We recognize that not all urban poor are black, and that many of our African-American brothers and sisters are not poor. However, the legacy of oppression and the ongoing breakdown of

social structures have left a lasting imprint of poverty on some parts of the black community. Race overlaps strongly with poverty in the city of Pittsburgh, and many inner-city neighborhoods are located very near to our church. Each week many of our members commute to our church by passing by neighborhoods which have a significant African-American presence and high levels of poverty (for example: the North Side, Wilksburg, Hazelwood, and the Hill District).

Poverty is clearly associated with other social factors such as family structure, education, crime/incarceration, and access to functional institutions. There are no easy solutions to these problems and we choose not to emphasize particular political policies. We expect that individual members of our church will differ on some of these matters. What we do choose to emphasize is that without a loving presence among our neighbors we cannot be faithful to God's call to display unity around the gospel. We believe that a loving presence is necessary for greater understanding, communication, and problem solving.

Appendix A: Overture 43, from the PCA General Assembly 2016

Therefore be it resolved, that the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America does recognize, confess, condemn and repent of corporate and historical sins, including those committed during the Civil Rights era, and continuing racial sins of ourselves and our fathers such as the segregation of worshipers by race; the exclusion of persons from Church membership on the basis of race; the exclusion of churches, or elders, from membership in the Presbyteries on the basis of race; the teaching that the Bible sanctions racial segregation and discourages inter-racial marriage; the participation in and defense of white supremacist organizations; and the failure to live out the gospel imperative that "love does no wrong to a neighbor" (Romans 13:10); and

Be it further resolved, that this General Assembly does recognize, confess, condemn and repent of past failures to love brothers and sisters from minority cultures in accordance with what the Gospel requires, as well as failures to lovingly confront our brothers and sisters concerning racial sins and personal bigotry, and failing to "learn to do good, seek justice and correct oppression" (Isaiah 1:17); and

Be it further resolved, that this General Assembly praises and recommits itself to the gospel task of racial reconciliation, diligently seeking effective courses of action to further that goal, with humility, sincerity and zeal, for the glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel; and

Be it further resolved, that the General Assembly urges the congregations and presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America to make this resolution known to their members in order that they may prayerfully confess their own racial sins as led by the Spirit and strive towards racial reconciliation for the advancement of the gospel, the love of Christ, and the glory of God; and

Be it further resolved, that the 44th General Assembly call the attention of churches and presbyteries to the pastoral letter contained in Overture 55 as an example of how a presbytery might provide shepherding leadership for its churches toward racial reconciliation; and

Be it finally resolved, that the 44th General Assembly remind the churches and presbyteries of the PCA that BCO 31-2 and 38-1 provide potent and readily available means for dealing with ones who have sinned or continue to sin in these areas.

Appendix B: Current Actions (October 2016)

Our goal in listing particular activities is not to brag, but to help demonstrate the connection between the theory and the practice. While the prior mentioned commitments are being presented now, we believe that the principles are thoroughly biblical and they have been guiding the actions of many in our church for some time.

1.) We will seek racial reconciliation by pursuing a more racially diverse congregation, with particular reference to the inclusion of African Americans.

- a. We will continue to make intentional steps to learn from our African and African American members and to better understand how our church would be experienced by someone who is not part of the dominant culture.
- b. We expect that this goal may be advanced by rigorous engagement with the following points.
- c. We will continue to value the opportunities that we have for African Americans to speak at important church events. In every case, a speaker is chosen for a wide range of factors. We simply acknowledge that this is a factor in our decisions.

2.) We will seek racial reconciliation by pursuing appropriate ministry partnerships with African-American churches in our city.

- a. We have intentionally sought to support Bethany Baptist Church over the last 10 years. As a result of this connection we have had members regularly help with their meal ministry and their summer camps for youth. We have also partnered to help with their food bank and even a car maintenance ministry. As a result of this partnership, Rev. Bill Glaze was asked to speak at our men's retreat last year and I was asked to speak at their ministry conference. We are continuing conversations with their leadership about ways in which we can pursue a closer partnership.
- b. Last year we partnered with New City Fellowship Presbyterian Church (EPC) to sponsor a panel discussion on Race and Police. The event was well attended and featured conversations between police and members of the community which made an impact on many who were present.
- c. This year we are helping to promote the "Gospel in the Urban Context" conference at Bethany Baptist Church in Homewood. The event is sponsored by the Pittsburgh Reformation Society and features two leading African-American ministers in the PCA. **Please join us on October 8th and 9th.**
- d. This year we are also helping to promote and host "A Common Narrative," a night of praise music featuring the worship team from Macedonia Church of Pittsburgh in the Hill District. Madeconia Church is a historic African-American church which shares our commitment to congregational participation in worship. While the style of the music

may differ, this offers an opportunity to expand our experience of worship. We share with them a commitment to make worship about God and not about a human performer. **Please join us Thursday, October 14, at the Twentieth Century Club.**

3.) We will seek racial reconciliation by supporting the development of African-American pastors.

- a. We are pursuing many possible partnerships that could encourage this goal.
- b. We have created a scholarship fund for African-American men who would desire to be pastors in the PCA. The fund is now called the William King Scholarship fund and has accrued \$4,000. Members of the congregation are invited to support this ministry by writing "William King Scholarship Fund" on the memo line of a check.

4.) We will seek racial reconciliation by investing energy in service ministry to our neighbors.

**It is a sensitive topic to discuss race and poverty, because we risk taking a condescending posture. But we recognize that in Pittsburgh there are many low-income inner city neighborhoods which are predominately African-American and which are dominated by cycles of poverty. In the case of some of our immediate neighbors, concerns for poverty do carry many of us across racial lines.*

- a. We have supported the Pittsburgh Project regularly for the past decade. It is a ministry that cares for the urban poor through home restoration.
- b. Over the past two years we have worked with Ambassadors in Sport to offer summer camps in underserved neighborhoods. Our long-term goal is to use sport as a way for bridging barriers.
- c. City Reformed sponsors a bible study in a local housing unit called Bellefield Dwellings. This monthly bible study serves mostly elderly Christians and offers bountiful opportunities to cross racial and social barriers.