

**NCP Confronting Racism Task Force
Discernment Report and Recommendations**

Foundational Scripture and References

*"Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in." Isaiah 58:12*

"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Jeremiah 29:7

"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." Galatians 3:28

"Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good for all people especially those who belong to the family of believers." Galatians 6:10

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; 4 they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever." Revelation 22:1-5

"...between the Christianity of this land and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference." — Frederick Douglass

"Mission is to church as fire is to burning." -- John Calvin

"The great ends of the Church are: – the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; – the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; – the maintenance of divine worship; – the preservation of the truth; – the promotion of social righteousness; and – the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world." -- The Book of Order

"As Jesus, the Christ, was born of Hebrew parents and rejoiced in the faith of a Syrian woman and of a Roman soldier, welcomed the Greeks who sought him and suffered a man from Africa to carry his cross, ... so we, as his followers are called to confront and heal racial and ethnic and national divisions that would impede the reconciliation of the world to God's self." (2 Cor 5:19). — First paragraph from the International Christian Movement "Toc H": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toc_H

“Sent by the Triune God to be agents of salvation, reconciliation, and justice, we empower and challenge our congregations to be Missional, Pastoral, and Prophetic. We are a relational network, proclaiming the gospel, aspiring to unity in Christ, and celebrating our diversity in service to God’s mission pursuing these emphases:

1. We will challenge, equip, and support our congregations and their leaders in their discernment of God’s invitation to discipleship and stewardship as we:

...

b. Bear public witness to the love, truth, and justice of God in Jesus Christ specifically in the areas of racism and reconciliation.”....

Preamble

“We need healing from the trauma of racism and healing of the mental conflict of the racist as they profess belief in Christ and acknowledge being taught to love thy neighbor but often find themselves thinking or acting contrary to this Christian call.” ~ Sandra Barrett, NCP CRTF

The NCP Confronting Racism Task Force (CRTF), as a part of the NCP Mission Coordinating Committee’s Race and Reconciliation Team, is made up of 21 members. The CRTF began its work in August 2017, and for a full year, CRTF was facilitated by Dr. Catherine Meeks, a noted academic and current Executive Director of the Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing in Atlanta, Georgia. Our first order of business was to begin the work of building the beloved community of trust. This was done using the following methods: (1) reading books that increased our awareness of systemic racism and its philosophies; (2) sharing our own personal experiences of and responses to racism; and (3) developing a way forward to listen to others in our Presbytery.

The conclusion of the task force’s work includes recommendations to NCP’s Leadership Council and ultimately our Presbytery for living into our 5-year emphasis to “Bear public witness, based upon the love, truth, and justice of God in Jesus Christ, specifically in the areas of racism and reconciliation.”

Throughout the year, CRTF continued its efforts of planning, discussing, and formulating purpose that would help to focus the work ahead to engage our local congregations to participate and contribute insight, and to identify what responses were needed. We started our public work at our September 2018 Stated Presbytery Meeting, beginning with a workshop entitled “The Color of Whiteness: Engaging White Privilege in Church and Society,” facilitated by Rev. Dr. J.C. Austin, Pastor and Head of Staff at First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, followed by a panel discussion on race with pastors and lay people from churches around the Presbytery. During the stated meeting, our Prayer of Confession engaged the words of the Interfaith Council of Metropolitan Washington statement on racism, drafted by former General Presbyter G. Wilson Gunn, Jr., and a Mission Highlights video introduced our task force at work, followed by a sermon by our CRTF facilitator Dr. Meeks. The CRTF developed a method for conducting “listening sessions” within their respective congregations and through three sessions conducted during Open Space in November 2018, January 2019, and March 2019. During these facilitated sessions by members of the CRTF, participants were asked to respond openly to the following questions:

- 1) As a child, what have you heard adults around you say about people of other races?
- 2) What are your basic thoughts/beliefs about people who are a different race than you?
- 3) How does your faith impact how you understand race?
- 4) What has been your experience of race in the church?

These “listening sessions” began in October 2018 and ended April 2019. In addition to the 3 Open Space sessions, there were 14 sessions held in local congregations across the expanse of the Presbytery.

Throughout this process of listening, some CRTF members continued dialogue after the first sessions in their congregations, and some Open Space participants and others took the questions on the Open Space page of the Presbytery's website back to their local congregations to begin an independent dialogue.

The results of the listening were stripped of personal identifying information such as name and church affiliation, while demographic information such as race and or ethnicity, age, and gender were used to help inform the responses. An 89-page document was created containing a full response from our Presbytery, including a response from three churches regarding their recommendations for a way forward, which overwhelmingly suggested a continuation of the dialogue with diverse groups.

Over the weekend of April 12-14, 2019, 14 members of the CRTF met for a retreat at the Wellspring Conference Center in Germantown, Maryland. The purpose of the retreat was to evaluate the listening sessions' responses to the questions. An early agenda item, while at the retreat, included CRTF members each responding to the four questions themselves. While reviewing, discussing, and evaluating the results of the listening sessions, we were joined, via Zoom video conference, by Dr. Meeks, who (1) helped the CRTF to consider next steps towards anti-racism dialogue; (2) to conclude this phase of our work; (3) to produce goals and recommendations for awareness, racial healing, and training; and (4) to report CRTF findings to the NCP Leadership Council and ultimately to our Presbytery. The information that follows describes the CRTF's proposal.

Findings

In setting out to listen in congregations of each CRTF member, we ran into resistance in a few cases, where a church declined to participate and two other task force members altogether dropped out of participation with no explanation. There was also a church that participated in the listening but with complete denial by both blacks and whites of racism. Others' responses were superficial, while yet others were very open in their responses about their experiences of racism—some to the point of tears after the session. Clearly unresolved trauma surfaced for a few. Three churches expressed responses to a fifth question regarding what they would like to be an outcome to these listening sessions. There was a strong desire to continue the dialogue. There was also an attempt to listen within the retirement homes where many older NCP members live. There was also resistance among those contacted regarding listening there. The most welcoming and open groups were at our three Open Space sessions in November, January, and March. Those whom participated in the Open Space sessions were happy to have the forum. Many expressed an interest in taking the questions back to their respective congregations. Overall, the outcome was welcoming and positive of this exercise, calling for continued discussion and activity around the subject of racism.

Conclusion

The NCP Confronting Racism Task Force (NCP CRTF) spent the last two years confronting racism or internalized oppression in themselves in order to listen openly and without judgment to those congregations, individuals, and entities that opened to our invitation to listen to their stories. In those stories were denial, unresolved trauma, internalized oppression, and the events that helped to make those participating who they are today. There was a strong desire to have the conversations continue, and there was the revelation that some in our churches need emotional support. There are congregations whom have begun their own internal dialogue about race, and there are clergy members whom have gone beyond their congregations to gather together on pilgrimage to learn more. The

efforts of the NCP CRTF have already influenced the direction of some in becoming an antiracist connectional community. To that end, the Mission Coordinating Committee is proposing a budget for 2020 to help the newly established Race and Reconciliation Team, led by Elder Therese Taylor-Stinson, move forward with the recommendations of the NCP CRTF. These actions will continue NCP's legacy of being at the forefront of the issues of our time, providing leadership to our beloved denomination, and living into our continued call to be missional, pastoral, and prophet, particularly in the areas of racism and reconciliation, and being living witnesses to the love, truth, and justice of God in Jesus. We understand the NCP Leadership Council is taking our findings and recommendations under consideration, and a process for a way forward will emerge.

CRTF Members

Elder Sandra Barrett, Garden Memorial
 Rev. Charles Booker, Bethesda
 Rev. Karen Cronenberger Chamis, NCP Staff
 Elder Lorethea Davis, Northminster
 Rev. Victor Hamel, Emmanuel Indonesian
 Rev. Brian Hamilton, Westminster DC
 Elder Les Henig, Northwood
 Elder Jochebed Jordan, Redeemer
 Elder George Kerr III, Westminster DC
 Rev. David Milam, St. Andrew
 Rev. Robert Melone, Mount Vernon
 Rev. John Molina-Moore, GP (Northminster-Western)
 Elder Jacqueline Moore, Sargent Memorial
 Rev. Bernice Parker Jones, Faith
 Elder Michelle Peters, Northeastern
 Elder Therese Taylor-Stinson, Northwood
 Rev. Alice Tewell, New York Avenue
 Rev. Rachel Vaagnes, Georgetown
 Elder Gilbert Wang, House of Transformation Taiwanese
 Elder Margaret Washnitzer, 15th Street