

A Southwest Conference Resolution on Restorative Racial Justice: Decentering Whiteness in Our Churches and Society

Adopted by the Annual Meeting October 4, 2020

Summary:

The Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ, recognizing our founding as a primarily white institution and our local churches as predominantly white churches, this resolution confesses our collective sin of racism as a conference; calls local churches and communities of the Southwest Conference to take intentional action to inform themselves about racism and the often overlooked, minimized and denied experiences of oppression of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color;¹ invites SWC members to become Interrupters in the continued cycle of racism and white supremacy; creates a process whereby ministry settings can be designated as Restorative Racial Justice and support one another in that process; and defines a moment when we may declare ourselves to be a Conference Awakening to Racial Justice, towards becoming the multiracial, multicultural expression of God's Kin-dom we profess and believe in.

Definitions:

- ✓ Prejudice – “a pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or groups toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics.”¹
- ✓ Bigotry – “Intolerant prejudice that glorifies one's own group and denigrates members of other groups.”²
- ✓ Decenter - When we talk about being in the center of society, by that we mean having access to power, control of resources and having the ability to enforce one's values. In the United States we have government, with the presidency, the Senate and the Supreme Court and these are overwhelmingly white, and for that matter, male, which is itself an element of whiteness. We have Fortune 500 companies, which are overwhelmingly controlled by white people. We have white families in control of a disproportionately large measure of the wealth of the country. We have a majority of white people who believe living and working in circumstances that are overwhelmingly white is normal, okay, acceptable, and even worth seeking out.^[SEP]By saying we need a multiracial center, we mean no single racial group should control the society's resources, power and values, and every racial and cultural group should have access to these things.^[SEP]Decentering Whiteness is the process of creating this paradigm change.
- ✓ Racism – “a system in which one race maintains supremacy over another race through a set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and institutional power. Racism is a “system of structured dis-equality where the goods, services, rewards, privileges, and benefits of the society are available to individuals according to their presumed membership in” particular racial groups (Barbara Love, 1994. *Understanding Internalized Oppression*). A person of any race can have prejudices about people of other races, but only members of the dominant social group can exhibit racism because racism is prejudice plus the institutional power to enforce it.”³

¹ We recognize that individuals may have different views of language used for self-identification. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) is a widely accepted acronym. See <https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-bipoc.html>. See also <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary#racism>

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs/wp-content/uploads/sites/140/Understanding-Privilege-and-Oppression->

- ✓ Implicit Bias – “refers to attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control.”⁴ “Notably, implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals’ stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess.”⁵
- ✓ Microaggressions – the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate dismissive, hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their affiliation, perceived or real, with a marginalized group. Microaggressions can be committed against any such group marginalized in our society – People of Color, LGBTQ people, women, people with disabilities,”⁶ from other faiths
- ✓ Macroaggressions – the overt violent behavior directed towards a specific race, gender, or sex.⁷
- ✓ White Fragility - “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable [for white people], triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium.”⁸
- ✓ White Privilege - Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.
- ✓ Complicity - any direct or indirect action that perpetuates a system of racism, privileging Whites above others.

Background:

Arizona, New Mexico, and El Paso, Texas people continue to commit and experience racism, both documented and ignored, such as:

- ✓ Dion Johnson (AZDPS in May) and Dalvin Holmes (Tempe Police in July) were both shot in the back
- ✓ Carlos Ingram Lopez was killed while in Tucson police custody in the same manner as George Floyd⁹
- ✓ Self-avowed White supremacist Patrick Crucius killed 23 people during a shooting rampage in El Paso, Texas. His goal was to kill Mexicans; bias-motivated crimes against Latinos rose nearly 14 percent across the country in 2019.¹⁰

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⁴ <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>

⁵ <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary#racism>

⁶ <https://texascasa.org/cultural-considerations-what-are-microaggressions/#:~:text=According%20to%20Psychology%20Today%2C%20%E2%80%9CMicroaggressions,their%20marginalized%20group%20membership.%E2%80%9D%20Microaggressions>

⁷ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/agd4cbo767e04768ad5a545485dce6c7>

⁸ Author Robin DiAngelo coined the term white fragility in her book by that title.

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/25/us/carlos-ingram-lopez-death-tucson-police.html>;
https://tucson.com/news/local/family-requested-autopsy-on-man-who-died-in-tucson-police-custody-differs-from-official-report/article_565bdd52-f28b-55d2-b3fi-83102dbbod29.html

¹⁰ <https://www.kold.com/2020/01/08/reported-hate-crimes-fell-arizona-advocates-skeptical-real-gains/>

- ✓ New Mexico (78) ranks first and Arizona (54) ranks third in the highest number of cases of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. One in three murders of Native Americans goes unreported to the FBI. Albuquerque (2nd) and Tucson (4th) are among the top 10 cities with the highest number of MMIWG cases.¹¹ Nationally, Native Americans are killed in law enforcement actions at a higher rate than any other race or ethnicity according to CDC data.¹²
- ✓ Bajit Singh and his family were threatened and India Palace, their restaurant in Santa Fe, NM, was vandalized by what are believed to be White supremacists in June, 2020.
- ✓ Calls to remove Confederate monuments have been met with public outrage
- ✓ Arizona has the fifth highest incarceration rate in the nation and it disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx people. In 2017, Latinx people comprised 31% of Arizona's state population, yet comprised 37% of people admitted to prison. Black people were overrepresented at an even higher rate, comprising five percent of the state population but 13% of prison admissions.¹³
- ✓ In New Mexico racial disparities in incarceration remain strikingly wide.¹⁴ New Mexico has experienced a 72% increase in its private prison population since 2000. The state uses private prisons more than any other state. Private prisons are the new Jim Crow. The privately detained immigrant population grew by 442% since 2002. In 2017, 73% of the detained population was confined in privately run facilities.¹⁵ Race-based disparities in sentencing as well as for-profit private prison industrial complex are the causes of these disproportionate incarceration rates, not more criminal activity among Black and Latinx communities.

Racism is pervasive in ways White people do not always see because it has been so much a part of the dominant culture. The Church, progressive expressions of Christianity, or our local congregations are no exceptions. Incidents of microaggressions and resistance to and criticism of social movements attempting to dismantle racism and White supremacy continue among us. Our predominantly White denomination lacks understanding of, appreciation for, and strategies to incorporate models for church, governance, faith formation, education, and accountability that are not rooted in generations of Eurocentrism.

Racism in the U.S. is a pervasive reality both expressed and experienced across generations. It results in traumatizing impacts to the souls of recipients of race-based oppression, those who witness it, as well as those who oppress. Because racism is rooted in intergenerational trauma, everyone needs spiritual community support to heal from that trauma, and for creating ways of being that do not center on White supremacy and 'othering.' Collective healing comes when people of all races collaborate to create cultural systems that are equitable and just.¹⁶

The United Church of Christ has a valuable legacy of involvement in abolition and civil rights movements, but the full work of racial justice remains to be done. Until the Church, particularly the ministry settings and members of the Southwest Conference United Church of Christ, acknowledge

¹¹ <https://www.uichi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report.pdf>

¹² <https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/10/us/native-lives-matter/index.html>

¹³ https://www.acluaz.org/sites/default/files/7.16embargofinal_the_racial_divide_2020.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3iOCKQBBSsbTjIMj7blcCSs1bD-A4iXUEAHGasBiasMcNpDCb37-NPdcw

¹⁴ <https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-new-mexico.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2020-01-23/why-new-mexico-uses-private-prisons-more-than-any-other-state>

¹⁶ See Menakem, Ressa. My Grandmother's Hands.

our complicity in these realities by virtue of our own individual and systemic racism, our witness for justice and efforts to create a just world for all are impaired and lack credibility. This resolution calls us to a higher level of integrity, transparent reflection, and vulnerability in accomplishing our mission. How can we more fully become the inclusive Beloved Community of God's Kin-dom?

Theological and Contextual Basis

Whereas in Genesis 1:26, 27 God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, to be like us... Humankind was created as God's reflection: in the divine image God created them; differently gendered, God made them," and there is nothing in our foundational understanding of humanity created by God that excludes any human being from reflecting the image of God, and there is no reference to skin color;

Whereas in Galatians 3:27-28 Paul writes: "'All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.'"

Whereas the two greatest commandments in the Gospels (Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-31, Luke 10:25-28) are "You must love the Most High God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

Whereas "If you say you love God but hate your sibling, you are a liar. For you cannot love God, whom you have not seen, if you hate your neighbor, whom you have seen." (1 John 4:20)

Whereas throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament, there are numerous verses about loving others, and none of these verses consider anyone made in the image of God as "The Other," and othering is never promoted by the Scriptures;

Whereas race is a societal construct dividing people into distinct groups based on the amount of melanin in our skin, which determines color, regardless of human ability or need, and is meant to maintain the power of White people;

Whereas the Sacrament of Baptism is the universal acceptance into the Church of Jesus Christ that makes all people receiving it part of a wider ecumenical family, and Christians are bound to receive as kin in Christ with full equality and participation in the leadership of the church all people, regardless of how much melanin is in their skin;

Whereas our baptismal vows include the promises "to be Christ's disciple, to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, and to show love and justice;"

Whereas the Church has not sufficiently understood the role of New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona in the slave trade and as enslavers, nor appreciated the contributions of African Americans to the culture and economy of these states over hundreds of years;

Whereas the Church has not sufficiently understood the role of New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona in

the oppression of Indigenous People and of colonized people and as oppressors, nor appreciated their contributions to the culture and economy of these states over hundreds of years;

Whereas if one person suffers from racism, all people suffer because our humanity is bound together (see 1 Corinthians 12:26);

Whereas “If we say that we are without sin, we lie, and the truth is not in us. But if we admit our sins, God, the faithful and just One, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all injustice.”¹⁷

Resolutions:

Therefore, be it resolved that the Southwest Conference United Church of Christ confesses the ways we have committed and have been complicit with racism through our thoughts, words, and deeds. In doing so we have not loved God with our whole heart, nor have we loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry for these sins and for the deep pain and suffering we have caused. We ask God and our neighbors for forgiveness. We commit to live more fully into the extravagant welcome for all people that has long been a value of the United Church of Christ.

Be it further resolved that the local churches and communities of the Southwest Conference call and encourage one another to take intentional action to engage in ongoing study of White privilege, White fragility, individual complicity with racism, systemic racism, White supremacy, the often overlooked, minimized and denied experiences of oppression of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and their contributions to our communities.

Be it further resolved that the Southwest Conference United Church of Christ calls upon all its members to become Interrupters of the continued cycle of prejudice, bigotry, White privilege, White fragility, and White supremacy. To be an Interrupter is to take action including, but not limited to:

- ✓ Learning with White friends and family about White privilege, White fragility, and White supremacy,
- ✓ Regularly reading books, watching performing arts events, and drawing on theological resources featuring Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to deepen understanding and appreciation of the history, contributions, and culture of these groups of people.
- ✓ Learning with our children through children’s stories about racism in age-appropriate ways,
- ✓ Centering the stories of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and their rich and diverse heritage in New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas,
- ✓ Forming partnerships with congregations of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color,
- ✓ Learning about and supporting organizations in New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas that make it a mission to be Interrupters,¹⁸
- ✓ Speaking up whenever you hear a comment or joke that marginalizes Black, Indigenous, and People of Color,
- ✓ Writing op-eds or letters to the editor about issues of bigotry, White supremacy, or racism in your communities,
- ✓ Making a public witness like putting a Black Lives Matter sign at your church or on your lawn

¹⁷ *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

¹⁸ American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Coalition to Stop the Violence Against Native Women (CSVANW), AZ Coalition for Change, and many others.

and prepare yourselves to welcome Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who may come to our churches, and for conversations with people who demonstrate White fragility because you take this step.

- ✓ Inviting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color into leadership roles and explore governance structures that reflect their experience.
- ✓ Asking Black, Indigenous, and People of Color what their needs are.
- ✓ Assessing your congregation's racial diversity, equity and inclusion. Participate in the UCC's racial diversity, equity, and inclusion assessment of the National setting of the United Church of Christ.
- ✓ Including elements in worship services that reflect the needs and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color present in your congregation and in your community
- ✓ Using your money to support businesses and ministries of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color,
- ✓ Inviting a Sacred Conversations to End Racism facilitator of the Southwest Conference to present a program in your congregation. The program could include many options from a selected movie with reflection to a programmed discussion or guest sermon.

Be it further resolved the churches and communities of the Southwest Conference United Church of Christ are encouraged to listen to, follow, and stand in solidarity with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who are leading change by challenging race-based systemic injustices in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona including but not limited to criminal legal reform, environmental degradation, economic deprivation, and exclusion from full participation in our communities.

Be it further resolved that the Southwest Conference United Church of Christ charges the Executive Board to convene a Racial Justice Ministry Group and commission them to create a process, approved by the Executive Board, by which local congregations can be designated as Restorative Racial Justice ministry settings of the Southwest Conference United Church of Christ, and to train, equip, and support our ministry settings and their leaders in the implementation of that process.

Be it further resolved that when no less than fifty percent (50%) of our ministry settings engage in the process for Restorative Racial Justice called for in this resolution, the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ will have declared itself to be a conference Awakening to Racial Justice.

Implementation:

The Committee on Church and Ministry Section B of the Southwest Conference United Church of Christ will take the lead in supporting and monitoring implementation of this Resolution as part of its annual programmatic action plan and budget. The Executive Board and Conference Minister assisted by the Conference staff will play an active role in building awareness of this Resolution and encouraging and guiding its implementation throughout the Conference.