

Presbytery of West Virginia Antiracism Policy

Our Theological Understanding

The Scripture reveals the existence of a singular, true God who manifests as a communion of three distinct Persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20, 2 Corinthians 13:14). This divine communion is characterized by a profound embodiment of mutual love, respect, welcome, and celebration. It is within this framework of divine relationship that God created humanity in God's own image (Genesis 1:26-27). This act imbues every human being with inherent dignity, a gift bestowed without distinction across all races and ethnicities.

The transgression of Adam and Eve introduced sin and fostered the blight of racism, corrupting the divine intention for human relationships. As followers of Christ, it is our sacred call to work continuously and actively to dismantle the structures and attitudes of racism, recognizing that such efforts are integral to the restoration of God's intended order.

In pursuit of a community that reflects the unity and love of the Triune God, we are called to embrace and practice love, welcoming, celebrating, and respecting one another, transcending all barriers of ethnicity and race. This pursuit is empowered by the Holy Spirit and grounded in the scriptural affirmation that in Christ Jesus, there is no division between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female; for all are one (Galatians 3:28). Our commitment to this principle is not only a response to the divine mandate but also a testament to the transformative power of the Gospel in addressing and overcoming the sin of racism.

Our Social and Historical Context

This community that God calls us to restore exists in a historical and present reality. West Virginia was created three years after Virginia seceded from the Union. Virginia was a slave state, while West Virginia argued whether slavery should be abolished gradually or all at once. They also wanted to remain a part of the Union. On its face, it would seem obvious that the new state would be on the right side of anti-racism. Sadly, such was not the case.

Indigenous people were occupying the land in the 1600s when colonizers arrived from Europe. In an effort to erase the history of the First Nation Peoples, the White power structure forcibly removed them from the area in the 1800s. According to Wayne Appleton of the Appalachian American Indian Association, "The official state position is that there were no Indians here when the white settlers arrived. Nobody knows why, but they weren't. And the fact is, that's nonsense." (WV Public Broadcasting. "Wild, Wondering West Virginia: Exploring West Virginia's Native American History" by Corey Knollinger, published February 8, 2019.)

In the 19th century life for people of color, West Virginia was fraught with contradictions. With the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation and the passing of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, it seemed that all the horrors of slavery would be abolished. People of color were free to practice all the rights of any citizen of the United States. They had access to education. That, however, was short-lived. "Separate but equal" was the order of the day. On paper, their rights looked promising. Due to continued racism, it was the opposite.

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Jim Crow became the law of the land, and West Virginia was no different than the rest of the states regarding how Blacks were treated. People of color yet again found themselves tied to the land, unable to make much economic progress compared to the Whites living around them. They were paid less, more in debt, and less likely to ever attain an equal economic status. As a result, they are economically disadvantaged to the present day. “Black West Virginians are more likely to be in poverty, get sick, die during childbirth, be suspended from school, or be incarcerated than their White counterparts.” (Mountain State: SPOTLIGHT. West Virginia Legislature.) “Black communities in West Virginia know what policies could make their lives better. Now they need them to happen.” (By P.R. Lockhart, February 27th, 2023.)

In the mid-1950s, Black West Virginians became involved in the Civil Rights movement with people joining organizations such as the NAACP, CORE, Black churches, and fraternal organizations. While those organizations made some progress over time, it has not been enough to combat the historical/systemic racism that has kept people of color from achieving all that they might have without that oppression.

The final issue to which attention needs to be paid is immigration. As a state with a lower overall population, the number of immigrants coming to West Virginia is also lower than that of states with higher populations. Nevertheless, from 1880 through 1920 tens of thousands of individuals from Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Italy, and Greece migrated to West Virginia to work in the state’s burgeoning industries, including railroads, timber, coal, steel, and glass. (e-WV, The West Virginia Encyclopedia, Ethnic Life). They, too, were discriminated against at that time. Today immigrants continue to settle in the state and face challenges.

West Virginians have a long, proud history of Appalachian culture. Therefore, immigrants of color (primarily Brown and Black people) may find themselves facing people in their new communities who are more resistant to people whose culture is different from what they have known. As we try to “welcome the stranger” (Hebrews 13:2) in our churches, we need to be cognizant of what ministries we support, what flags we fly, and how our theological stance might be viewed by our new neighbors.

Our Call to Action

Recognizing that racial prejudice has been and remains ingrained in the United States, our state, and our church, we too must recognize we are all complicit in the still entrenched legacies of racism and white supremacy that plague our communities and our church. But with greater awareness and deeper understanding, we can come to affirm that racism is the opposite of what God intends for humanity. All forms of discrimination and marginalization are sins against God and humanity, inconsistent with our Christian values. With opened eyes, minds, and hearts, we can unlearn racist values and undo racist structures that persist. The Presbytery of West Virginia heeds God’s call to become an inclusive church where all peoples and all individuals are welcomed and treated as equals. To this end:

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1. The Presbytery shall commit to offer, disseminate, and make available information and resources that focus on dismantling racism within our church institutions (Presbytery and congregations) and the communities we serve.
2. The Presbytery shall require “Dismantling Racism Training” at least once every five years for:
 - Teaching Elders
 - Christian Educators
 - Commissioned Pastors, Authorized Lay Preachers, and Ruling Elders elected to serve on Presbytery Committees
 - Any non-Presbyterian pastoral leaders
 - All Candidates for Ministry
 - All Presbytery Staff
 - Honorably retired teaching elders, ruling elders serving sessions, and other congregational leaders and staff shall strongly be encouraged to participate in such training.
- a. Training Content, Training Schedule, and Evaluation
 - i. The “Dismantling Racism Training” shall be developed and administered by the Committee on Ministry and include the following elements and concepts to be presented in the training:
 1. A theological foundation in our calling to be a mutually loving, respectful, just, and welcoming community, as reflected in our Triune God.
 2. Core concepts and understandings of institutionalized and individual racism.
 3. Historical Christian and Presbyterian Church positions on race and racism.
 4. The history of racism within West Virginia.
 5. Tools, strategies, and practices to develop anti-racist behavior and culture within our Presbytery and congregational life.
 - ii. The training shall be offered at least once a year.
 - iii. All required leaders, as defined above, shall attend the Presbytery’s “Dismantling Racism Training” within one year of approval of this policy/or one year after their arrival, and once every five years thereafter.
 - iv. Tracking of Training - “Dismantling Racism Training” presenters will report completion of training within 2 months to:
 1. The Committee on Ministry: Who will track completion of the training of Teaching Elders, non-Presbyterian pastoral leaders, Commissioned Pastors, and Christian Educators.

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2. Stated Clerk: Who will track completion of the training of persons serving in Presbytery leadership and Presbytery Staff.
3. Vocations Committee: Who will track completion of the training of Candidates for Ministry.
 - v. Failure to fulfill this training requirement within the specified time will result in a call from Presbytery entities with oversight (COM, Stated Clerk, VC) to discuss obstacles and remind individuals to complete the training and undertake further steps if necessary.
 - vi. Evaluation of the impact of training on individual and institutional practices shall be assessed 6 months after the training through a (qualitative/ quantitative) survey. Results shall be reviewed annually by the Committee on Ministry to determine any needed revisions to the training and recommend changes.
 - vii. Sufficient funding to implement this training shall be designated in the Presbytery Budget.
3. The Presbytery shall commit to seeking to recruit and select racial and ethnic minorities to leadership roles.
4. The Presbytery shall actively attempt to fill 5% of all annual contracts for services, supplies, and purchases by firms/organizations owned by racial and ethnic minorities. (References on where to find information on minority businesses:
 - <https://www.mbda.gov/page/us-business-fact-sheets>,
 - <https://minorityaffairs.wv.gov/Pages/default.aspx>- Call for list of minority businesses
 - Annual Spring WV Minority Business Expo - See Herbert Henderson, Office of Minority Affairs)Presbytery staff shall report annually to the Presbytery the percent of contracts filled by racial and ethnic minorities.
5. This policy shall be reviewed by the Presbytery every three years.

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