

RACISM: BROTHERS AND SISTERS TOGETHER

The Vermont Ecumenical Council and Bible Society's member denominations and/or their Vermont-related judicatories unite in declaring that racism is sin, evil, and a violation of God's intention for humanity. Among these member denominations a variety of resolutions have been adopted over the decades. Study materials have been prepared and used, and congregations have sought ways to be ever more inclusive and diverse in leadership and membership. While denominational materials speak to the particularity of their own members, they are all rooted in scripture, Christian faith, church history, and theology. They call Christians to repent of deeply embedded attitudes and to work proactively to break down the walls of fear, suspicion and prejudice that remain, while still resisting the temptation to relax vigilance and allow new barriers to emerge.

The Vermont Ecumenical Council calls upon its member denominations and the larger society to acknowledge that, for the most part, we/they are not where God calls them/us to be as an inclusive Church, and to renew efforts to address and eradicate racism in its most subtle forms by reviewing regularly their own and others' materials, statements and efforts about racism.

In Vermont, with its low percentage of African-American and Hispanic residents (and many Native Americans assimilated into the wider White culture), it might seem that racism isn't a serious problem. Nevertheless, many Vermont residents, including people of faith, have been appalled to learn of (and local news services have given us evidence of egregious examples of racial bigotry in the state including:

- Racist graffiti and cross burnings
- Public school students have alleged race-based harassment and sued their town to cover tuition to a more hospitable school system
- On a per capita basis, incarceration of black males is higher in Vermont than anywhere in the country
- Discriminatory Housing
- "Driving While Black" arrests: even some well-respected and well-known African Americans report being stopped without reason
- Police have stopped persons of color shortly after reported crimes based solely on the color of their skin

In response to allegations of racial profiling, some police departments are adopting procedures to track demographics in arrests so as to determine whether there is a disparity based on race. There have been proposals to make this a statewide practice. We commend these efforts by our public servants. Vermont residents have responded to racism in general and to such publicized situations in a proactive way. Martin Luther King Day is the occasion when community and school events are held to raise awareness and, as of 2008, Juneteenth is a state holiday. Several communities have used the Study Circle process to educate themselves, build bridges, and address structural racism. As a community of Christians and as citizens of the state, the Vermont Ecumenical Council calls on its members to acknowledge participation in the sin of

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racism, and at the same time, we are called to seek forgiveness and be proactive in societal efforts by developing a solidarity with people experiencing and/or suffering from racism.

White Christians are called to go beyond avoiding, condemning and working against overt bigotry. We/they are also called to recognize that racism is not just about overt acts, but also about a complex web of attitudes and social structures that benefit Whites and disadvantage people of color. This “white privilege” is invisible to most Caucasians because it is the air that they breathe, omnipresent affirmations of whiteness and an absence of the suspicion, subtle harassment and, to some extent, cultural isolation with which people of color live. Not recognizing the wider context, Whites too often think people of color overreact to trivial incidents or slights. White Christians, however, are called to repent of and relinquish unearned advantage and unwitting complicity in the same way that they are called to repent of overt acts of evil.

One of the most consistent truths taught in Sacred Scripture is that the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jesus is totally inclusive, no one individual, no group of people of whatever race or nation is excluded from God’s plan of salvation and his realm of love. When we say Our Father, we are acknowledging that there is but one God, the parental source of all human persons. We are all members of the family of God, and as such, we are all brothers and sisters.

Racism contradicts justice and the justice that flows from love. Racism is not just a social or cultural or political problem; above all, it is a moral and religious problem of immense magnitude. It is not enough to oppose racism; we are called (by God) to promote the fraternity of all people, without discrimination, under the fatherhood of God. All of us belong to God and hence to one another. Each of us exists to love and be loved.

What we proclaim here, not only to all Christians, but to all persons of good will, is not only our obligation to oppose the evil of racism, but the duty of all to live in love and for love. To create a community of everyone: a family that embraces everyone. This is the object of our prayers, our efforts and this statement.

We accept and applaud the denominational statements already published on racism and urge our members and all people of good will to read them.

Footnotes

Denominational Statements:

Episcopal - The Sin of Racism: A Call to Covenant: A Pastoral Letter from the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, March 2006;

<http://www.dioceseofvermont.org/Resources/Dismantling%20Racism/BishopsRacismPastoral94.html>

American Baptist - Policy Statement on Racial Justice - www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/racejust.htm

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Greek Orthodox - "Racial Equality", Coniaris, Fr. Anthony, Contemporary Moral Issues Facing the Orthodox Christian, chapter 35., Light & Life Publishing, 198_ [?]; Harakas, Stanley S., Contemporary Moral Issues Facing Orthodox Christians, Light and Life Publishing, Minneapolis, MN, 1982

Lutheran -8/31/93 "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture", Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (www.ELCA.org/socialstatements/freedinchrist/); 11/1/07 Statement of presiding bishop (www.ELCA.org/bishop/messages/allmessages.html)

Methodist - "United Methodist bishops plan racism dialogues", United Methodist News Service, 11/15/2007 <http://umns.umc.org>

Presbyterian - www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/facing-racism.pdf; www.pcusa.org/acrec/pdf/combating-racism.pdf

Roman Catholic - U.S. Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism, 1979, www.usccb.org (?)
"Poverty & Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good," Catholic Charities USA Poverty in America Issue Brief

Society of Friends - Minute on Racism developed by their working party on racism.

White Privilege - Clark, Kendall "Defining White Privilege," whiteprivilege.com McIntosh, Peggy, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Napsack"

Race in Vermont/ New England - Witness, Karen Hesse, 2001; fictionalized account of Ku Klux Klan impact on a Vermont town, scholastic Press, New York, 2001; Traces of the Trade, Katrina Brown, documentary about black and white descendents of the DeWolfs of Bristol, R.I. , largest slave- trading family in early America, 2007; Through White Eyes: Color and Racism in Vermont, Robert Walsh, Book Surge, So. Burlington, VT, 2006; "State Seeks Ways to Track Racial Profiling By Police, Rutland Herald, July 18th, 2008; "A Look At Racism in our Region, VPR Vermont Edition Program, August 13, 2008

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