

GCE 03 GENERAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE STATEMENT THAT BLACK LIVES MATTER

Origin: GCE Anti-Racism Working Group

1. What is the issue?

The United Church of Canada has stated its opposition to racism in all forms, but has not issued a clear statement that Black Lives Matter.

2. Why is this issue important?

The recent murder of George Floyd under the knee of a Minneapolis, Minnesota (USA), police officer, and other evidence of oppression of Black persons have brought a passionate uprising of concern around the world, and demand acknowledgement that racism is a reality in Canada and in The United Church of Canada, and a commitment to action.

3. How might the General Council Executive respond to the issue?

The General Council Executive could endorse the attached statement that Black Lives Matter (Appendix A) and direct the General Secretary to communicate it to The United Church of Canada and the broader community.

Appendix “A”

18 June 2020

Dear Siblings in Christ:

We are writing to you as people of the same church.

On 2 June, Moderator Richard Bott joined with Evangelical Lutheran National Bishop Susan Johnson and Anglican Primate Linda Nicholls in a letter acknowledging the existence of anti-Black racism in our churches and society, committing to work collaboratively on the International Decade for People of African Descent, and inviting church members to make local commitments for action.

As the General Council Executive we wish to affirm and amplify this message throughout the church, and to add to it the clear and unequivocal statement that Black Lives Matter to The United Church of Canada. We admit the church’s failure to uphold Paul’s admonition against racism to the churches in Galatia: “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). The church should always be sanctuary, not a site of racism and discrimination. For that reason, we are intentional about becoming an anti-racist church.

We confess that our United Church has not been such a sanctuary against racism. In particular, we regret that our church has been complicit in racial injustice, and that systemic anti-Black racism still exists within our structures. The church has not always lived up to its understanding of itself. We are sorry for our inability to hear and respond to the pain of our Black siblings.

Our church’s anti-racism policy states that racism—which is a sin—is present in society and in our church. We lament that there continue to be so many painful stories of racial exclusion of the Black, Indigenous, and other racialized peoples among us from across the church. For the sin of racism that continues to manifest itself within our church, we are truly sorry.

Our anti-racism policy notes that “we believe change is possible. We believe in forgiveness, reconciliation and transformation and the potential to learn from stories and experiences.” We call the church to action. When we say that Black Lives Matter, we must act on those words. In 1 John 3:18, we are urged to “love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” We affirm our commitment to take tangible action against anti-Black racism, and, to report on this to the 44th General Council.

We also commit to working towards specific actions to interrogate and dismantle systemic anti-Black racism. To be truly effective in confronting anti-Black racism, however, the people of the United Church, in all communities of faith, need to commit to work for racial justice.

For too long, the Black, Indigenous, and other racialized peoples among us have borne the burden of education and action against racism. We therefore encourage the church, particularly the White church, to:

- Publicly commit, in worship and elsewhere, to the stance that Black Lives Matter;
- Educate themselves about anti-Black racism and White privilege;
- Name and confront anti-Black racism and White privilege wherever they appear in our personal lives, communities of faith, structures of The United Church of Canada, and in Canadian society;
- Provide safe spaces for people of colour to report racist harassment and achieve redress.

We are committed to accompanying and supporting you. We have established an anti-racism working group within the Executive, and recently re-mandated the White Privilege Working Group, which draws from the Church's twenty-year legacy of dedicated work on anti-racism and interculturalism, to assist in this work.

The working group has been mandated specifically to help identify "where the culture of Whiteness is evident in our structures, processes, and systems," and to recommend to senior leadership "how to dismantle the systems and structures that perpetuate White privilege within the church." This may include inquiry into anti-Black racism in our system and an accompanying policy recommendation on racial harassment.

To date, the group has contributed to [a list of resources already available](#) to help the church educate itself on anti-Black racism and White privilege. This will be updated regularly. It is also developing a workshop on racism and White privilege within the specific context of the United Church.

It has been clear for many years that racism is a defining force in Canadian society that we are called to resist. Yet too often, those among us who are White actively choose not to confront racism in ourselves, our institutions, and our country.

In the last several months, the world has been shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic in a way that we never anticipated. Similarly, anti-Black injustice in the United States has literally burst into flames and continues to reverberate with calls for systemic change in the United States and beyond. We know that we cannot go back to the way things have always been. As followers of Jesus, we can no longer choose to ignore injustice.

"Love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" – these are words that no member of the United Church, with our creedal commitment to "seek justice and resist evil," can ignore.

May the One who created us all strengthen and accompany us in this journey.

Members of the General Council Executive