



Unity Declaration on Racism and Poverty

*A diverse body of Christian leaders
calls on the churches and Congress
to focus on the integral connection.*



Unity Declaration on Racism and Poverty

As leaders from diverse families of U.S. Christianity, we are called by the Spirit to work together with new urgency against the resurgence of racism and the persistence of poverty in America. We see around us an increase of harmful attitudes and policies toward people of color and people in need. That painful reality and the current push for trillions of dollars in cuts to anti-poverty programs are bringing us together in a new way. While we have different positions on other questions, we are united on the gospel and biblical teaching on poverty and racism—feeling invited to do so by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

We believe that racism and poverty are theological issues.

The integral relationship between poverty and racism unifies us against both. They are both issues to which the gospel of Jesus Christ speaks—which also calls us to love our neighbors, without exceptions. Our unity on these issues is because they are theological issues for us, not merely political or partisan ones. These fundamentally biblical concerns challenge all of us and both of the major political parties.

Racism is a sin that goes back to the founding of our nation. At its root, racism is in conflict with the opening declaration in Genesis 1, that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. Racism literally throws away the biblical principle of *imago dei*—the image of God in all of us, with no exceptions. Racism is a sin against God and all of God’s children. Therefore, the whole counsel of God calls us to preach against the sin of racism from all of our churches’ pulpits and call for repentance.

The body of Christ is perhaps the most diverse racial community in the world. When people of color in the body of Christ suffer—while many white members of the body of Christ do not acknowledge their pain—we are violating the principle laid down in 1 Corinthians 12: that we are one body with many parts, who suffer with and honor one another. As Galatians instructs us, “there is no more Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female, because we are all united as one in Christ” (3:28).

The historical sin of racism lingers on in America today, continuing and evolving in our social systems of economics and education, policing and criminal justice, housing and gentrification, voting rights and suppression, in our racial geography, and, painfully, in the continued segregation of our churches, which adds to our own complicity. Racism is more than individual behavior, language, and overt hostility toward particular people. Racism is systematic and structural in America and harms people of color in very specific, measurable, and tangible ways.

The failure to defend the lives and dignity of people living in poverty, by individuals or governments, is also a sin against God, with 2,000 verses in the Bible clearly outlining God’s fundamental concern for people who are poor, vulnerable, and oppressed, instructing the people of God to protect and help them and holding political leaders responsible for them. Jesus says, in Matthew 25, that how we treat the “least of these” is how we treat Christ himself.

The world and our country have made progress against poverty in recent decades. It is possible to make further progress—perhaps virtually end—hun-



ger and extreme poverty in our time. We see the alleviation of material misery as an experience of God's loving presence in our own time, and believe that God wants us to seize this opportunity.

**To our churches:
What we are doing and can do.**

Most of our churches are active in helping people in need, struggling people within their congregations or in their communities. We need to do more, but many of our churches directly help millions of people every day. Local church leaders often work to bridge the racial divides in our communities, and many are searching for authentic and specific ways to address the rise of white supremacy.

Since the God of the Bible requires social justice and charity, our churches and many of our members also work to influence public policies. Christians have a wide array of political viewpoints. But a majority of the leaders of national church bodies have spoken out repeatedly against cuts to programs that provide help and opportunity to hungry and poor people in our country and around the world. We have also spoken out against renewed expressions of white racism, ethnic nationalism, and hateful attitudes toward people of color, immigrants, refugees, Jews, and Muslims. Many of us are active in support of immigration reform, criminal justice reform, and voting rights for all.

We are deeply troubled by the budget proposals coming from Congress and the president. They outline more than \$2 trillion of cuts in programs for hungry and poor people in our country and around the world. These cuts would hurt struggling people of all races, including millions of low- and middle-income people who need safety-net programs at some time in their lives. The hardest hit would be African American, Latino, and Native American communities, where the poverty rate is already high, and

among people in the poorest countries in the world.

The threat over the coming year of this broad assault on anti-poverty programs that support families struggling to make ends meet is unifying us—bringing us together in a more vigorous, multiracial Christian movement to maintain a circle of protection around all people in poverty and God's children of color in particular, who are disproportionately impacted.

**To Congress and the White House:
Our united appeal for healing and reform
in our nation's politics.**

We appeal to the president and Congress to work together for the common good. We especially call upon political leaders who are also people of faith to protect all the people in our country and world who are struggling with economic deprivation and frustration, hunger and poverty, disability and disadvantage—and racial bigotry that often contributes to inaction and hard-heartedness.

God's love for all people moves us to reach out to people and leaders all across the political spectrum. We respect and pray for all those who are in authority—that our nation and world “may lead a quiet and peaceable life” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Conservative and liberal people, and those with differing political philosophies, may disagree on how to live up to our nation's ideals, but our loving God calls all of us to work together for liberty and justice for everyone.

We appeal to all people, especially Christians, to actively work against racism and poverty—in their personal and local engagement and as advocates for public policies that foster racial equity and healing, shared prosperity, and peace in our country and worldwide. The spiritual power of a fresh, energetic, multiracial Christian movement against both racism and poverty is our prayer. So help us God. ■



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