

Have mercy on me, O God,

*according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.*

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

*and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit. (Ps 51:1-2, 10-12)*

Dear Pastors, Clerks, and Church Leaders,

We want to take a moment to speak candidly about the tragedies and turmoil that are enveloping our country.

As our nation continues to reel with grief and shock from the sudden impact of the coronavirus, we are no less plagued by America's sin of systemic racism. The tragic and inexcusable killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor are but the most recent and visible flash points in the painful and infuriating reality experienced for generations by our communities of color. As Governor McMaster affirmed, "South Carolinians are well within their rights to publicly and peacefully express anger over the inexcusable taking of George Floyd's life. We should all be angry. There is no excuse for this."

To our congregations and members of color, we hear your pain and fatigue over the injustices you face every day. You should not be treated with less respect or afforded less opportunity in our nation because of the color of your skin, but we know that you are, repeatedly and systemically. We live in a social, economic, and political system that disadvantages persons of color.

To our predominantly white congregations and members, we must all listen to our communities of color. In our listening, we might better understand that the "peaceful protests and public expressions of grief and anger" are a testimony to the travesties of our history and the reality that we have yet to put in place the necessary policy reforms that dismantle systemic racism.

Such protest may be enacted in the same spirit in which Jesus overturned tables in the Temple. Ask yourself, if Jesus had not disturbed the peace, would the defenders of the status quo have given him a second look? We do not condone riots or violence to other human beings. Perhaps, though, we might have sympathy for those who have lost hope and act out their frustrations when, repeatedly, nothing seems to change.

In "Facing Racism," the churchwide anti-racism policy of the Presbyterian Church (USA), we state, "Racism is the opposite of what God intends for humanity. It is the rejection of the other, which is entirely contrary to the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others. Because of our biblical understanding of who God is and what God intends for humanity, the PC(USA) must stand against, speak against and work against racism."

Furthermore, in The Confession of 1967, we affirm Christ's call to the church:

To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as God's reconciling community. This community, the church universal, is entrusted with God's message of reconciliation and shares God's labor of healing the enmities which separate people from God and from each other. Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit. The church maintains continuity with the apostles and with Israel by faithful obedience to his call.

If Foothills Presbytery intends to live the gospel of reconciliation, then we must share in our neighbors' frustration over the racial disparities and injustices that persist in American society. As followers of Christ we are called to be part of the solution. We must honor this moment in history as a time that God in Christ is calling us to courageous conversations and a deeper commitment to the long work of justice.

Friends in Foothills Presbytery, let us heed the call of Christ, in word and deed, to be God's reconciling community in the Upstate of South Carolina, and to engage in shared ministry to "heal the enmities which separate people from God and from each other."

Let us Pray:

God of all people, we ask for your guidance and correction as we seek to grow in our love and understanding. We acknowledge that we have not listened to our siblings, and we have not acted justly in response to our nation's continued racism – both systemic and individual. Help us to seek justice and peace and to work for reconciliation. Help us to grow in the likeness of Christ. Help us to join you in creating a world where all of your children who are made in your divine image are afforded all the freedom and opportunity you desire in your coming Kingdom. This we ask in Christ's name, Amen.

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Michael Hoyt (Chair, Coordinating Council)
Rev. Deborah G. Foster (Presbytery Leader and Stated Clerk)

On behalf of the Coordinating Council: Tom Evans, Sidney Mize, Holt Andrews, Nath Briley, Dick Christopher, Pressley Cox, Elizabeth Jones, Bill Lancaster, Dennis Lathum, Michael Sullivan, and Dennis Tedder. Ex-Officio: De Calvert and Stan Reid, Debbie Foster and Gordan Raynal

In conversation with the working group tasked by the Coordinating Council to address the current racial strife in our nation: Rev. Dr. Nath Briley, Rev. Michael Sullivan, Rev. Dr. Lerone Wilder, Rev. Chad Wright-Pittman, Rev. William Lancaster, Rev. Gordon Raynal, Rev. Debbie Foster.