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### **Dismantling structural racism**

Racism is deeply embedded in the life and history of the U.S. Through colonization, slavery and a shameful history of legislative action and judicial pronouncements, our nation created and embraced a system that valued and devalued people based simply on skin color and ethnic identity. People of color were deliberately subjugated for material, political and social advantage. Racism today is the continuing and enduring legacy of this history.

There is a growing awareness among Presbyterians that racism is a crisis and must be addressed. The PC(USA) is strongly committed to the struggle for racial justice.

### **Why do we talk about *structural* racism?**

Racism is not primarily about individual prejudice or an individual's beliefs and attitudes. Rather, racism in the U.S. is a socially constructed system. Some people are advantaged, and others are disadvantaged, merely because of their skin color, ethnic identity or their ancestral background. Social power and prejudice have combined to treat people differently, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Some people are privileged while others are oppressed. As a consequence, there is unequal and inequitable access to resources such as money, education, information and decision-making power.

Structural racism can show up in multiple ways, including:

- Housing discrimination that limits where people of color can live and steers them to rental markets rather than home ownership.
- Laws and policies that deny people of color access to quality education, employment and adequate health care.



- Food apartheid — areas deliberately devoid of quality, affordable fresh food.
- Mass incarceration and criminal justice systems that disproportionately target people of color with lengthier sentences, “stop-and-frisk” laws, the over-policing of communities of color, the school-to-prison pipeline, etc.
- Environmental racism — the dumping of hazardous waste, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of access to clean water that results in a range of serious health problems in communities of color.



### What can we do to help dismantle structural racism?

Confronting deeply ingrained racist systems and structures in our communities and country takes sensitivity and stamina. Before congregations and worshiping communities can confront the harsh realities of racism, it is helpful to have a good foundation.

One good place to start is by taking the **21-Day Racial Justice Challenge**, which is well suited to individuals, churches and mid councils. The

challenge invites us to do something every day to raise awareness about the perniciousness of racism and encourage action in response to that awareness. The PC(USA) has joined several nonprofits, organizations and school systems in adapting the challenge for our use. Here is an example of how the challenge works:

Day 1. Read the PC(USA) churchwide anti-racism policy, “Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community,” at [facingracism.org](http://facingracism.org).

Day 2. Study the Week One lesson from the [Facing Racism Study Guide](#).

Day 3. [Watch](#) an updated version of the Clark doll experiment, which explores how early-in-life ideas of racial inferiority and superiority are internalized.

Day 4. Study the Week Two lesson from the [Facing Racism Study Guide](#).

Day 5. [Read the resolution](#) of the 223rd General Assembly of the PC(USA) on environmental racism.

Day 6. [Watch](#) the Presbyterian Hunger Program’s webinar, “Impact of Environmental Injustice on Low Income and Communities of Color.”

Day 7. [Read](#) what youth at the 2016 Triennium learned about environmental racism.

Day 8. Study the Week Three lesson from the [Facing Racism Study Guide](#).

Day 9. Choose a resource on the Doctrine of Discovery to read from [facingracism.org](http://facingracism.org).

Day 10. [Watch](#) the PBS documentary “Unspoken: America’s Native American Boarding Schools.”

- Day 11. [Take the awareness test](#). Go out and change what you notice.
- Day 12. Study the Week Four lesson from the [Facing Racism Study Guide](#).
- Day 13. [Read the Confession of Belhar](#). Reflect on how your church is using and living into it.
- Day 14. [Visit the Presbyterian Intercultural Network's website](#). Connect with a chapter near you or inquire about creating one.
- Day 15. Study the Week Five lesson from the [Facing Racism Study Guide](#).
- Day 16. [Watch the TED Talk](#) "How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them" by Verna Myers.
- Day 17. [Read "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"](#) by Peggy McIntosh.
- Day 18. Study the Week Six lesson from the [Facing Racism Study Guide](#).
- Day 19. Notice the structures and practices in your church. Raise questions about how they help or hinder racial equity.
- Day 20. Engage: Suggest studying the [Facing Racism Study Guide](#) as a church or mid council to your leaders.
- Day 21. Act: Commit to doing the challenge again. Invite someone to join you.

### **The theology behind dismantling structural racism**

Racism is anti-Christian. In 2016, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a comprehensive churchwide anti-racism policy called "Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community." The policy states:

*Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others. It is also a lie about God, for it falsely claims that God favors parts of creation over the entirety of creation. 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. Anti-racist effort is not optional for Christians. It is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship, without which we fail to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.*

Structural racism is not only the "opposite of what God intends for humanity," but is also an example of how sin is systemic rather than simply personal. As the PC(USA)'s anti-racism policy states, "Reformed theology offers a nuanced understanding of sin. Calvin did not understand sin to be simply an individual belief, action, or moral failing (Calvin, 1960). Rather, he viewed sin as the corporate state of all humanity. It is an infection that taints each of us and all of us. No part of us — not our perception, intelligence, nor conscience — is unclouded by sin."

Psalms 14:3 and Romans 3:10 remind us, "There is no one just, not even one." The PC(USA)'s policy also reminds us that this realization "does not mean that human beings are awful. Rather, it means that we must have humility about our own righteousness, and that we must cling to the grace of God in Jesus Christ."

### **Scriptures for study and reflection**

Matthew 25:31–46

Genesis 1:1–31

Psalm 104

Acts 10:9–23

1 John 4:7–8

Ephesians 2:19

Isaiah 65:17–25

Micah 6:8

Mark 7:27–28

### **How do we dismantle structural racism?**

- **Become a Matthew 25 congregation!** [Sign up](#) and pledge to do your part.
- **Useful tools and resources for study and engagement**
  - [Facing Racism web pages](#)
  - [Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries web page](#)
  - [Presbyterian Women's anti-racism work](#) (and [here](#))
  - [Environmental ministries](#)