

No. 9729
Discernment

REPORT ON DISCERNMENT

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The 1996 General Board approved a provisional process for discernment in the life of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This provisional design called for both church-wide discernment processes (congregational/regional/general models) and General Assembly focus on specific doctrinal and social justice issues confronting the life of the church.

In this design, the following definition of discernment was used:

Incorporating the disciplines of prayer, Bible study, theological reflection, and dialogue, “discerning” is a communal process by which the church seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit to identify, understand and respond faithfully to the word and the will of God regarding significant issues of faith and life for individuals and societies.

The 1996 Administrative Committee approved the Nature of Biblical Authority and Racism in North America as the first two items for discernment in the church's life. It was proposed that these items be pilot processes.

INTRODUCTION

In the late eighth/early seventh century BC, the prophet Micah railed against the cultural corruption of his day. He maintained the need for pure worship, devotion to God's purposes for creation, and a sensitivity to other human beings in the face of growing Assyrian influence. Micah was a commoner who lamented the destructive power of a Jerusalem government that was losing its religious center and giving up its concern for the well-being of the people. He called the people back to God by reminding them that God's holy requirements are to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

It is from Micah's faith narrative that General Minister and President Richard Hamm draws as he calls the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to embody three marks of faithfulness. At the 1995 Pittsburgh General Assembly, Dr. Hamm called the church to live out a deep spirituality, to be in true community, and to share in a passion for justice.

As a religious practice, “discernment” touches all three of these marks. Discernment is a way of seeking, recognizing, and intentionally taking part in the life-giving activity of God. It is a kind of listening for and being guided by the Spirit of God as the church seeks to live out God's intentions for a New Creation. A spiritual discernment process intends for the church to engage in deeper spirituality, calling the church to

be community in ways that embody God's redemptive power, and fueling the church's passion for justice in the name of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Through the Office of the General Minister and President, three opportunities for ministry, related to discernment. are emerging:

- 1) The development of the processes of discernment on racism in North America and Biblical authority,
- 2) The creation and adoption of new models for the practice of discernment in the life of the church. and
- 3) The intentional inclusion of spiritual disciplines and discernment in existing church structure and practice.

THE PROCESSES OF DISCERNMENT

Racism in North America

The Steering Committee met November 7-9, 1996, for its first meeting. The group focused on 1) clarification of its mission as it leads a church-wide process of discernment on racism, 2) definition of terms related to root causes and experiences of racism, 3) planning the General Assembly plenary session on racism scheduled for July 28th. 9:30 a.m. 4) developing models of discernment that will be specific for congregations, regions, and other units of the church as they engage in the process on racism

In its meeting on January 31-February 2, the committee continued work on the above foci. The group spent the majority of its time outlining a statement to be issued to the church entitled "A Call to Faithfulness: That They May All Be One." With this document, the committee has shifted its original assignment to include an emphasis on racism in the life of the church. It is the wisdom of the committee that the church needs to address its own institutional racism even as it continues to address the issue of racism in North America. It is the intention of the committee to follow the five phase process of discernment (outlined below), amending that process as needed. In September of 1997, a congregational and inter-congregational model of cross-racial dialogue will be sent to all congregations.

For some of its resource development work, the steering committee has received a \$10,000 grant from Reconciliation.

Biblical Authority

The Steering Committee met October 3-5, 1997, for its first meeting. The group focused on 1) clarification of its mission to lead the denomination in discernment on the authority and the role of the Bible in the life of the church, 2) introduction of the topic of Biblical authority for discernment at the General Assembly through a plenary session (July 26th) and a forum (July 26th afternoon), 3) discernment of ways to encourage encounter with the transformative power of God in the Bible through worship, prayer, study, and mission.

In its ~~second meeting, February 27–March 1, 1997, the group clarified its assignment by deciding to focus~~ the church's discernment on the question: "What is the authority of the Bible to shape the thought and life of the church?" The guiding principle for this discernment is: "Whatever authority the Bible has in the church's life, it must be life-giving."

To help congregations address this overarching question, and the many more questions in people's minds around the issue of authority, the group is designing a study/inquiry manual to be distributed to all congregations in September. This booklet will help congregations reflect upon the Bible's current place or authoritative role in the church's common life.

The General Assembly plenary time will suggest ways in which the uses of the Bible have presented tension points in our common life. We will engage in collective Bible study on the issue of authority, be reminded of stances on the authority of Scripture from our tradition, spend time in prayer, and be allowed time for dialogue around our experiences of the role of the Bible in our congregations.

The workshop time at General Assembly allotted to the Process of Discernment on Biblical Authority will be devoted to a "Biblefest." This learning center-based workshop will invite people to experience the Bible in new ways. Resources for facilitation will be shared by the steering committee and the editorial staffs of CBP and DHM.

New Models of Discernment

In Richard Hamm's call for a season of deep spiritual renewal, he suggests that Disciples need models of spiritual practice which encourage a spirituality that is rational, experiential, relational, and detectable. The image of coming around the communion table—where the presence of God resides as two or three are gathered, where Christ is the host, and where there is a glimpse of the realm of God (God's New Creation) that encompasses and celebrates varied gifts, stories and experiences—offers a guiding vision for communal spiritual discernment.

Intentional discernment of God's calling for the church suggests the need to find alternative means of decision-making—decision-making processes that are in addition to, not in replacement of, processes Currently being used. To be discerning of God's activity in the church and the world invites us to try models that are alternatives to the debate, deliberation, or managerial models of deciding the church's mission. The discernment process in no way reduces the opportunity for individuals, and groups in the church to be activists in their witness to the world. It is anticipated that the discernment process will bring many more people along in discovering the pain and injustice and also the vision of what God desires for humanity. It is hoped that as more people discover the disparity between reality and God's reign, there will be an increase in Christian public witness. As people make discoveries along the way of discernment. they will be able to involve themselves in action as is appropriate for their situation or context.

As the steering committees on the process of discernment on racism and biblical authority began their work, it became apparent that a common process of discernment was needed. While the original design

of a discernment process was helpful in terms of the various kinds of material needed, it fell short of the needed design in at least three ways: 1) the process focused on a study-document model rather than a discernment model, 2) identifiable movements (steps) in the process were minimal, and 3) intentional spiritual discipline was not built in to the process in a way that would consistently call forth an openness to God's leading. Currently, the Office of the General Minister and President is revising the provisional design of a church-wide discernment process into a five-step model for the issue-focused processes to follow. This model builds upon ecumenical research into and

experience with the practice of spiritual disciplines in decision-making, meaning-making, and mission-building work (especially helpful to this model is the 10-step process designed by Charles Olsen and Danny Morris, *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, (Upper Room and Alban Institute, 1997). These movements interweave to serve the intended purpose of each other.

- 1) **Calling to Faithfulness:** This is the part of the process in which the church works to clarify God's call to take up a specific issue for discernment. What is God's vision for the church as it relates to a particular issue? In this given situation, what guiding statement grounds the church so a faithful response might be discerned? The guiding statement is a theologically/biblically based principle of commitment.

This call should include group consensus and deep prayer around a disposition toward being passionately committed to seeking God's leading and activity in the world/church. The faithfulness that is sought is to make decisions that will bring the church into full participation in the ongoing creative, redemptive, and sustaining work of God in the world.

This call is ever-guided by the belief that we are in covenant with God to respond to God's longing for a New Creation: the realm of God in our midst. As such, our understanding of God's desires for God's creation become the guidelines for our articulation of principle of commitment.

The call is a) framed in a question, b) grounded in a principle of commitment to God's vision, and c) affirmed with a commitment to heed God's calling.

- 2) **Repenting:** This moment is a time of giving up specific agendas and the intention to engage in win-lose debate. It is a collective recognition of and commitment to the need to listen and engage in dialogue. "In the ancient world *repentance* was a positive and dynamic action which focused less on regret for the past than on possibilities for a renewed future." (R. Allen) Repenting may include confession, an agreement on a need for redemption or reconciliation, and agreement to let go of predispositions or expectations. Repentance involves a change of heart or change of direction, turning away from sin and turning toward God's possibilities.

Repentance includes several steps:

- a) Recognition that the church has fallen short of God's intentions for the church or the world in specific ways relative to the given topic.
- b) Letting go of old presuppositions and old ways of addressing the issue.

~~e) Developing an (Ignatian) attitude of indifference toward all other drives and desires except the desires of God. Through prayer, study, and reflection individuals must align themselves with God's purposes, detaching themselves from pre-set outcomes. Like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, this is the for the group to move to a position of: "not my will but thy will be done."~~

d) Opening to God's new possibilities. This step begins what is continued in the next phase. It is another commitment—this time to (Ignatian) "deep sensitivity to the ways and being of God." This sensitivity is the movement of the collective heart into

the possibility of future hope; a leap of faith into God's promises for resolution,

transformation, and reconciliation.

3) **Being In Communion:** The Scripture says wherever two or three are gathered in Christ's name, there is God's presence. Communal reflection, dialogue, individual story telling (in Christ's name and with attention to God's presence), sharing of history, group prayer and worship, and Bible study are the foci for this moment. Being in communion includes time for solitude or private space, but is also highly relational. It is a time to gain clarity around the issue as it impacts the church, but also a time for holy inspiration on new possibilities and directions. Here, it is imperative to hear from a multiplicity of voices offering varying perspectives. Communal consideration of God's leading requires the input of the marginalized as well as the leaders.

As a movement, "Being in Communion" picks up with openness to God's possibility. Already, however, the disciplines of Bible-study, prayer, theological reflection, and history gathering have been utilized to help frame the issue as a call to faithfulness. So in this movement, the Scriptures are revisited, prayer is undertaken, stories are shared, reflection occurs to help begin to envision possibilities of transformation that are consistent with God's leading.

Genuine and honest dialogue is absolutely necessary. Debate is not the goal or the intent of this step. Yet, people of faith must struggle. There is no lack of intense engagement in varying positions on an issue as the collective heart comes to some assurance of presence of God moving in the midst of the group. Indeed, there must be sacramental moments if a group is to move in the direction of God's leading.

4) **Living in the Spirit:** This is the exploring phase. What patterns, ideas, possibilities are emerging? How can these possibilities be improved by listening for God's yearning for what the church can be? It includes testing the options through active involvement, prayer, reflection for a sense of rightness or wrongness (Ignatian consolation or desolation). It might also include letting things be for awhile, before coming to full conclusions. Living together in the Spirit and exploring the possibilities of action, moves, most often, by consensus and dialogue rather than by debate and vote. It is intentionally inclusive of as many perspectives as possible, yet it weighs each possibility against the tests of tradition, biblical inquiry, and the sense of God's movement in the present.

Within this movement, it is important that explorations and options be tested and weighed. As many people have noted, "The history of the church is littered with the stories of people who

~~claimed guidance from the Spirit when the prejudices of self-deception reigned instead.”~~ (*Practicing Our Faith*, p. 114.)

It is necessary then to test for authentic and unauthentic spiritual prompting.

Several criteria are suggested by Frank Rogers, Jr.:

Fidelity to Scripture and tradition—is it consistent with the writings and teachings of the Bible understood as a whole? (Deut. 13:2-6, Gal. 1:6-9)

Fruit of the Spirit—does the outcome nurture the fruits of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, for the sake of the community? (Gal. 5:22-23, 1 Cor. 13)

Inner authority and peace—a deep sense of peace and calm, over time, regarding the direction or decision.

Communal harmony—over time (sometimes not initially), the decision or direction should lead to reconciliation and harmony for the community. (John 17:23, Acts 4:32)

Enhancement of life—the decision or action should lead toward wholeness, health and empowerment for the community and those within it.

Integrity in the process—the process of decision making should not be violated by persons who are unwilling to examine options or by persons who withhold information or feelings about a given option.

The commitment on the part of the group, in this movement, is to a kind of patient waiting and listening even as the group takes steps toward the leanings of one option—testing and exploring its truth and efficacy.

- 5) **Witnessing:** This phase gives “body” to the “will of Christ for the church” as the group understands it at this time. This moment is an active one—the “being the church as we’re called to be the church” moment. Witnessing is living the Gospel as the group has come to understand it, including the activities of the other movements even as the discerned direction is lived into.

The intent of this phase is to give human witness to God’s desires for the world. Yet, even this phase is open to revision, revisiting of the other phases, and change of direction. What must be remembered is that discernment “rarely yields absolute certainty; action itself is part of the discernment process... because, sometimes our action reveals that a direction is misguided, other times actions reveal that our discernment is confirmed.” (*Practicing Our Faith*, p. 110)

Intentional Inclusion of Spiritual Discipline and Attitudes of Prayer in the Life and Work of the Church

In working with the steering committees in discernment processes, several things about the nature of spiritual discipline were learned. Central to this learning was the experience that much of the decision making work of the church occurs in a climate that is void of deep spiritual grounding. Spiritual practices, which seek God's guiding Spirit, contribute to a climate that encourages the openness necessary for discernment. This climate finds its roots in the disciplines of theological study and reflection, storytelling, Bible study, confession, praise, thanksgiving, almsgiving, acts of compassion, fasting, listening for marginalized voices, calling upon marginalized voices, calling upon guiding images or stories, dialogue, historical reflection, solitude, active

work, visioning, worship, and other disciplines of faith. A climate of discernment implies that inspiration and governance are held together such that the life of the church (structure and mission) is attuned to God's presence.

For many years, the churches have relied on secular models of governance, leadership development, and decision making. The danger of modeling church life on corporate-board room, managerial, or even parliamentary models of organization is that the church can lose its center in faith. While these models continue to offer important insights for the life and work of many churches, an approach which continually frames the questions of church life in the history and tradition of the Christian faith is also necessary. The Office of the General Minister and President seeks to encourage the church to practice spiritual discipline in its life and mission by structuring the Administrative Committee meeting, the General Board meeting, and the General Assembly so that the business of the church is guided by significant attention to prayer, Bible study, theological reflection, and dialogue.

CALL TO FAITHFULNESS: THE LIFE-GIVING AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE IN THE CHURCH

Through the ages, the church has shown great respect for the Bible, looking to it for guidance, comfort, strength, and challenge, encountering in it the life-giving power of the Word of God. In our common life, the Bible has brought unity as the normative book of the Christian faith and the source of proclamation in worship. It has offered strength in times of sorrow, a reconciling word in times of dispute, a promise for hope in the midst of destruction, a prophetic challenge to witness to Christ's call for justice for all.

It is also true, however, that the church has fallen short in holding up the Bible as a great witness to God's activity in the world. In this time when more people attend sporting events than worship services, when the North American church finds itself on the margin of a culture which is sometimes hostile and often indifferent to its ministry attitudes about the Bible also seem to be in flux. For many people, the Bible is nothing more than an irrelevant, archaic tome with paper-thin pages which has little significance in daily life. For others, the Bible is nothing more than a set of rigid rules, petrified by time and used to defend the church against the threat of change. Efforts to define the nature of the Bible's authority in our life together have often led to division.

~~Believing that the Bible can bring good news to the whole of creation as a living witness to the God who~~ calls us into fullness, the Steering Committee for the Process of Discernment invites the church to take a deeper look at the role the Bible plays in congregational life—past, present, and future. Specifically, we call upon congregations to enter into prayer, dialogue, reflection, and study to help us discern together:

What Is the authority of the Bible to shape the thought and life of the church?

Believing that God calls the church to move beyond arguments about the Bible’s authority which oppress, divide, or harm, we offer a principle to ground the church’s discernment on this issue:

Biblical authority which is authentic will be life–living.

Over the next year, we invite your congregation to consider the ways in which the Bible serves as a life-giving authority in your common life. We also encourage your church to acknowledge the blocks which have kept it from experiencing the full power of the Bible’s witness.

In September, each congregation will receive a booklet that will aid in a church-wide process of discerning God’s activity and leading regarding the issue of Biblical authority as it is framed above. This booklet will ask

congregations to covenant with the whole church in prayerful reflection about the authority of the Bible in study, devotional life, decision-making, and worship. It will invite your congregation to address questions about the role of the Bible in your life, not by adding another program to your schedule of church activities, but by infusing the discernment process into your ongoing ministry. Along your journey, it is the hope of the committee that the booklet will serve as a guide to spark your own creativity and imagination as we seek God’s guidance in our life together.

The committee seeks to gather a composite picture of how Disciples take the Bible’s authority seriously in congregational life, while calling ourselves to greater faithfulness for the future.

Steering Committee for the Process of Discernment on the Nature of Biblical Authority:

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**CALL TO FAITHFULNESS:
THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE**

~~The Steering Committee for the Process of Discernment on Racism calls the Christian Church~~
(Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada to practice faithfulness with regard to the elimination of racism, which exists in all levels of the church.

Our self-understanding as members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is reflected in the Preamble to the *Design*:

As members of the Christian Church,
We confess that Jesus is the Christ,
 the Son of the living God,
 and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.
In Christ's name and by his grace
 we accept our mission of witness and service to all people.
We rejoice in God,

 maker of heaven and earth,
 and in the covenant of love which binds us to God and one another.
Through baptism into Christ
 we enter into newness of life
 and are made one with the whole people of God.
In the communion of the Holy Spirit
 we are joined together in discipleship
 and in obedience to Christ.

At the table of the Lord
 we celebrate with thanksgiving
 the saving acts and presence of Christ.

Within the universal church
 we receive the gift of ministry
 and the light of scripture.

In the bonds of Christian faith
 we yield ourselves to God
 that we may serve the One
 whose kingdom has no end.

Blessing, glory and honor
 be to God forever. Amen.

While this statement does not bind the church to a doctrinal stance, it does suggest that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) identifies itself in covenant relationship with God. As such, we have a commitment to live in love that binds us to God and to other people and to accept the mission of service and witness to all people. The Holy Spirit guides the church's mission in Christ. Baptism joins each person to the whole people of God. The Lord's Supper reminds us that Christ's presence is with God's people in all of life. It is with these beliefs that we proceed in prayerful discernment in a call to faithfulness regarding the elimination of racism in the life of the church.

~~As followers of Jesus, we have been called into unity as reflected in Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 17:18ff.:~~

As you (God) have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

We have affirmed with the Apostle Paul that

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28-29)

And,

All the members, though many, are one body, as it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (I Corinthians 12:12-14)

As we affirm our unity, we also acknowledge the diversity of God's creation. The human family is a mosaic of color and language, culture and memory. Individuals and peoples are gifted with multiple and diverse skills and perspectives which, when shared within a community of mutual love and acceptance, enrich the whole.

In Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, the varieties and diversities of the divine gifts are emphasized:

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need

~~this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (I Corinthians 12:12-26)~~

When we gather at the Lord's Table, we celebrate the diversity of all people, our brothers and sisters, who gather as one in Christ Jesus. We also affirm the transforming power of God to make whole that which was broken; to make one that which was divided. When we welcome people into fellowship through baptism, we celebrate the unique heritage and gifts each person brings to the whole of Christ's church. We also affirm the transforming power of God to bring new life to Christ's church.

Yet, human communities have sometimes lived in a way that fosters a belief that the unique gifts of one culture are superior to those of another culture. In the fear of losing their own sense of value, persons have sought to devalue other cultures whose self - understanding may be different. To devalue any person or culture separates us from God and one another and is sin. We confess that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Racial and cultural prejudice are prevalent forms of sin within our church and our communities. We in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have recognized these problems in the past and, through General Assembly resolutions, have sought to address them. We have named injustices and have spoken through General Assembly action to offer guidance to the various manifestations of the church about addressing the sins of racism which exist among us.

In 1969, the General Assembly adopted a resolution which challenged the church to live up to its vision of God's call to unity and acceptance of our diversity. This resolution called for the church to work for legislation to change the plight of the poor, "many of whom are minority persons;" the exploration of the possibility of a "land bank" to help persons in economic hardship: a response to the "urban crisis" with offices and financial resources in each general unit: the investment (by general units with investment portfolios) in institutions making loans for poor and minority persons; the development of multi-racial staffs in all general units; the

recruitment of and scholarship provisions for persons of color who are training for ministry; the constitution of all delegations, commissions, and boards with 20 percent racial minority balance: and the setting up of an Urban Affairs Commission to devise a program to overcome prejudice and racism.

As a result of this and a variety of similar resolutions and initiatives on the part of all manifestations of the church, some positive results have occurred, including but not limited to the following:

- Reconciliation Mission was established in 1967 and reaffirmed in 1969 and 1971 as a permanent office and fund for working to support racial reconciliation and anti-racist projects (grants).
- The General Nominating Committee began using the 20 percent racial/ethnic minority provision for all boards and committees it established following the 1969 General Assembly,

- ~~A goal of 20 percent racial/ethnic persons in employment and representation on boards for all general units was established.~~
- The Short-Term Employment Experiences in Ministry Program to prepare African American and Hispanic persons for ministry was created; the David Kagiwada scholarship fund was initiated to set up assistance for American Asian seminarians,
- Specific programs in general units, regions, and local congregations to combat racism and its effects were implemented.
- The Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries and North American Pacific and Asian Ministries and offices of education and ministry for the African American churches were established.

Yet, we have failed to achieve full unity, equity, or reconciliation in the church, as evidenced by:

- The non-election of any person of color to current positions as regional minister or general unit president.
- The near-absence of congregations which have sought to be multi-culturally diverse in membership, worship forms, and leadership.
- Refusal to engage in policies which would encourage diverse representation on many boards and commissions throughout the church.

We call the whole church to a season of prayer, repentance, dialogue, Bible-study, and theological reflection to discern God's desire and guidance on ways to move toward the full unity for which Christ prayed. We call the church to envision the realm of God where human beings are not defined in opposition to each other—one superior, the other inferior: one subject, the other object. We call the church to cultivate a Christ-like valuation of our shared humanity. And we invite the church to tell stories and name experiences which define the barriers to that unity and which offer guidance toward the kingdom of God.

To facilitate this discussion, we propose the following common definitions of racism and its dynamics:

Racism is racial prejudice joined with power.

“Racial prejudice” is any action or attitude, conscious or unconscious, that demeans or subordinates an individual or group based on skin color, race, language, or culture. Racial prejudice is sin because it serves to divide the body of Christ and dehumanize children of God.

“Power” is used to mean access to institutions or control of the means of production. Power that is joined with racial prejudice is coercive, manipulative, and/or competitive, giving impetus to the unjust acts of racism.

Thus, when those who have socio-economic power exercise racial prejudice, racism occurs.

While some progress has been made in race relations, racism in North America still persists and is pervasive. As a systemic problem, power and privilege based on race can manifest itself in many ways.

Racism has individual, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural manifestations.

Individual Bigotry: an unfavorable stance toward another person or group. Racially motivated bigotry manifests itself as separation of persons, stereotyping; devaluation; fear; scapegoating; and overgeneralization based on race.

Examples of individual racial bigotry include:

- crossing the street when a person of another race is approaching.
- teachers who claim to be separating their classrooms into groups based on ability when, in actuality, the groups are race-based.
- claiming that all persons of one race have a particular trait or talent or that all “look alike.”

An example of personal racial bigotry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is the statement by some that “we won’t come to General Assembly if worship is going to be full of that kind of music (meaning African-American Spirituals).” Or people who say, “Why do we have to have Scripture read in other languages? Why can’t they just all learn English?”

Internalized Racism: an unfavorable opinion of self or feelings of low self-esteem and low self-respect based on one’s own race. When the dominant culture is white, it devalues persons who are non-white. This devaluation is then taken on consciously or subconsciously by persons who are non-white.

Examples of internalized racism include:

- an African-American child who doesn’t believe she can be a physician because she is taken to white doctors all her life.
- intra-racial gang violence that occurs when people so devalue themselves that they also devalue others of their same race enough to violate them.

An example of internalized racism in the church is a Latino woman who walks into the regional office and mistakes the Mexican-American associate regional minister for the cleaning woman.

***White Privilege:** automatic advantages and/or rights given to persons based solely on the fact that their skin color is white.

Examples of white privilege include:

- in North American schools, history is told primarily from a European perspective.
- white North Americans can swear, dress in secondhand clothes, or not answer letters without having others attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of one's race.
- white North Americans can take jobs with affirmative action employers without having coworkers suspect that they got the jobs because of their race.
- white North Americans don't have to be on their "best behavior" when stopped by police for a burnt-out headlight, for fear of being arrested.

An example of white privilege in the church: European Americans and Canadians can expect that the General Assembly program and worship will take into consideration white-church tradition and history, though it may not take into consideration all of the other traditions represented in the church.

***Institutional Racism:** discrimination that exists within public and private organizations, the government and legal systems, the media, and other institutions which metes out rewards or penalties based on race. Racism in

institutions impacts "career advancement, the way social goods are distributed, who receives training and skills, health care, formal education, political influence, moral support, self-respect, productive employment, fair treatment under the law, decent housing, and the promise of a secure future for self and children." (*Institutional Racism in America*, Knowles and Prewitt, Prentice-Hall, 1969.)

Examples of institutional racism include:

- police brutality prompted by a person's skin color.
- redrawn district lines to prevent voting blocks that would benefit persons of color.
- media portrayal of persons of color as evil or bad.
- exclusion of persons of color from the governing boards of most large corporations.

An example of institutional racism in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is that all 36 regional ministers are European-American and all 11 general unit presidents are European American.

***Devaluation of Cultural Variations in Experience:** use of power to perpetuate the cultural heritage, use of language, and tradition of persons of European descent while at the same time denigrating or

~~destroying the cultural heritage of African Americans, African Canadians, Caribbean Americans, Blacks, Asian Americans, Latinos, Hispanics, Indigenous Persons, First Nations Peoples, or Native Americans.~~

Examples of cultural racism include:

- insisting on using the English language and refusing to have bilingual education in areas of the country dominated by Spanish-speaking people
- the use of Indian names for sports teams, including the portrayal of Native peoples as “savage,” and the insensitive use of another religious tradition.

An example of cultural racism in the church is that “God” is often imaged as a white grandfather Jesus is portrayed as a younger white man with light brown hair.

Confronted with the sin and injustice of racism in the church and society, we are called to ministries of racial reconciliation to promote personal transformation and self-pride, institutional anti-racism, and multi-cultural diversity.

***Personal Transformation:** A conscious, intentional effort on the part of European Americans to understand the privilege from which they benefit and an intentional effort to alter conscious and unconscious personal participation in the systems of prejudice and racism.

Example: Intentional participation in a study-dialogue group to understand how racism affects one’s local church and community (e.g. the region of Kentucky).

***Self-pride:** Ministries which intentionally upbuild all persons as gifted children of God in such ways that individual self-worth reflects the truth that every person is created in God’s image.

Example: Afterschool programs for children from areas where intra-racial violence is prevalent. These programs are for the express purpose of teaching children to value themselves, their families, and their cultural heritage so that violence to self and neighbor is minimized (e.g. DAWN’s program in the Capitol Area Region).

***Institutional Anti-Racism:** A conscious, intentional effort to eradicate racism in organizations and structures.

Example: General level units sponsoring anti-racist sensitivity training for all staff (e.g. National Benevolent Association).

***Multi-Cultural Diversity:** To be truly knowledgeable, welcoming, and respectful of the image of God in every person by celebrating the richness of racial and ethnic diversity of God’s world. The church must recognize its call to be as diverse as the community it seeks to serve.

Example: Traditionally white churches hiring an African American senior minister to help the church minister to a culturally diverse population in the neighborhoods surrounding the church (e.g. Broad Street Christian Church, Columbus, OH).

Now, by the grace of Jesus Christ and trusting in the transforming power of God our Creator, we invite the church to confront the sins of racism, individually and collectively. We invite the church to covenant to work with brothers and sisters of all races, languages, and cultures, to live toward God's glorious realm, where all have a place at the table and none shall be turned away. Through God's power, we encourage the church to undergird our common work through prayer and ministries of love.

Groups within the church are invited and encouraged to prayerfully reflect upon this document together. Further, the steering committee on the process of discernment on racism encourages you to turn your attention to racism in the life of your church or community. Individuals, elders groups, Sunday school classes, and small groups throughout the life of the church can study the scriptures listed, pray for insight and understanding, and research the history of your particular region or institution's witness to the elimination of racism. Through all of these spiritual disciplines, we invite your prayerful discernment; we encourage you to seek to be a part of God's activity and leading toward God's realm. As you do so, the following questions may guide this process:

- **How have we fallen short of God's intentions for creation with regard to the celebration and valuing of diversity throughout the church?**
- **Where do we see signs of the elimination of racism in the church?**

Please mail your comments and responses to:

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