

Fourth Presbyterian Church Antiracism Covenant

PURPOSE STATEMENT

At Fourth Church, we believe that loving one another as Christ has loved us means that we are called to directly address historical and present racial biases by actively opposing racism. In our church, we seek to embrace values and practices that enable us to experience Beloved Community, where differences are seen as assets that are celebrated and experienced as strengths. We commit to these values and practices so that all people will feel deep belonging and a shared sense of humanity, seeing the image of God in each other. We enter this covenant seeking ways to live into our antiracism call as individuals, as committees and as a church. We understand and accept that we are all in different places on our antiracism journey, yet we take this path together trusting in God's guidance and love.

INTRODUCTION

Genesis 1:27 "God created humanity in God's own image...."

John 13:34 "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

The Presbyterian Book of Order encourages churches to actively nurture a "covenant community of disciples of Christ."¹ This Antiracism Covenant responds to this call and seeks to directly address historical and present racial biases and inequality that have prevented us from fully experiencing Beloved Community, where differences are seen as assets that are celebrated and experienced as strengths so that all people feel deep belonging and a shared sense of humanity, seeing the image of God in each other. (*Underlined words can be found in the Glossary.*)

As Christians, we are commanded to share with all people the unconditional love that Christ showed us. We are called by God to fight Racism because it is a sin against God and we are God's children. We must rid ourselves of Racism that separates us from God and each other. We must name it, renounce it, seek forgiveness for it and affirmatively work to live as one in Christ.²

Racism is still a powerful force in our country. Persistent and pervasive racist practices have created social injustices that have enduring repercussions in our society. Throughout our nation there is an increase in voter suppression laws, attacks on equity and inclusion efforts, disproportionate incarceration and more severe sentencing of Black people, violent policing in Black and Brown neighborhoods, and unequal application of medical support and health care for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). In our predominantly White neighborhood we still see the residual effects of targeted predatory lending and historic redlining which created segregated neighborhoods in our city.

Antiracism is thought by some to simply mean the absence of malice towards BIPOCs. In this covenant, however, the term antiracism refers to the practice of actively identifying and opposing Racism however it may be present—consciously or unconsciously—in ourselves, our institutions and culture. More than an absence of malice, antiracism is an active practice-- identifying barriers and obstacles to full participation in the life of the church and finding ways to dismantle them, as we believe Christ asks of us.³

This antiracism covenant is a pledge to God and to each other, in reliance on God's promises and blessings, and enabled by the power of God's Spirit, to create the conditions in which all people feel deep belonging, thrive and flourish. In this way, we strive to become a Beloved Community.

REPENTANCE

1 John 1:8-9. *"If we say we are without sin, we lie, and the truth is not in us. But if we admit our sins, God, the faithful and just One, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all injustice."*

"[We] cannot fix what [we] will not face." - James Baldwin

In order to move forward, Fourth Presbyterian Church must acknowledge its own historic role in supporting and benefitting from White Supremacy, as well as the contemporary tendency to reinforce a White-centered culture as the preferred or presumed superior norm.

Historically, the Presbyterian church established itself on this continent in the context of colonization and many Presbyterians, including clergy and scholars, provided theological justification for both the Doctrine of Discovery and slavery. The Bible has unjustly been used to justify discrimination, prejudice, and abusive behavior toward Black people, indigenous peoples and other people of color. Fourth Church, itself, is situated on the homelands of the Potawatomi people, who cared for the land until forced out by non-Native settlers. The Ojibwe, Odawa, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Miami, Mascouten, Sac and Fox, Kickapoo, Ho-Chunk, Menomonee, and tribes whose names have been lost as a result of genocide also lived, gathered, and traded in this region.⁴

We repent on behalf of our church for those times that our church stayed silent or disengaged while systems of oppression affected communities of color from birth to death, preventing them from flourishing, through racial prejudice, White Supremacy and socioeconomic inequity. We grieve that Fourth Church was a silent bystander amid Chicago's 1919 Race Riots and was not a stronger supporter of our country's Civil Rights movement during the 1960s. Harrison Ray Anderson (Pastor from 1928-1961) resisted attempts to integrate Fourth Church because he believed that the effort was "cause-oriented rather than inspired by the gospel."⁵

We acknowledge not enough has been done to right the wrongs of the sin of Racism and we accept the challenge to continue the unfinished and proactive work of antiracism. We recognize and seek to address our continued discomfort with discussing Race as a congregation.

We confess that we have sometimes allowed ourselves to be deceived into believing that individual acts of kindness and good works alone could overcome centuries of systemic inequity. Generous good works provide respite, support and dignity for people in need, but don't dismantle systems of perpetual racial oppression that disproportionately benefit White communities and individuals, reinforce White Supremacy and White-centered culture, and harm peoples of color.

We confess that we have not always been good collaborative stewards of our resources and recognize that we can be more actively involved in following the leadership and supporting the work of organizations and churches led by BIPOCs.

HOW WE LIVE INTO OUR VALUES AND DEMONSTRATE OUR COMMITMENT

*1 John 4:7-8. "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.
Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.
Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."*

"...the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellowmen, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess."

PC(USA) Book of Confessions, Confession of 1967:9.44

We recognize that the past has shaped our present. Fourth Church was founded and has been historically led by White people. Today, it remains a predominantly White church in a nation built on an inequitable foundation. Even if we stand for the equality of all, we are entrenched in the legacy of racial oppression and have work to do to seek out and remove barriers to full participation and deep belonging of all.

As Christians we are called to express our faith authentically in how we live, politically and economically. Our church has commendably taken steps to diversify our congregation and to incorporate different racial and ethnic traditions in worship. However, antiracism goes beyond diverse representation. Representation is an important first step but not sufficient.

To build a truly Beloved Community, Fourth Church needs to identify and embody Transformational Values⁶ that foster a spirit of collaboration, are rooted in a spirit of abundance, sacrifice control in favor of collaboration, honor diverse voices by affirming that there is more than one right way to do things, slow down enough to base decisions on unfolding relationships, and value long-term effectiveness over an expedient efficiency that fractures relationships. Embracing Transformational Values as a core way of being is foundational to becoming an antiracist church and Beloved Community.

For these reasons and more, we commit ourselves to do the work of becoming Beloved Community by countering Racism in all we do and to regularly reflect on our efforts. As individuals, we can build our antiracism knowledge and our relationships with people different from ourselves. As committees, we can explore ways to live into Transformational Values and practices in our work together. As a church, we can periodically survey whether we are creating a deeper sense of belonging among people of color. To this end, we covenant with God and with each other as a church to:

1. Inform ourselves about White Supremacy and other forms of presumed White Superiority, whether conscious or implicit, that maintain White-centered culture. Explore and understand the tactics used to delegitimize the work of antiracism and examine actively and humbly our own hearts, attitudes and assumptions so that we can identify and undertake the spiritual work required to dismantle Racism in ourselves, our communities and the nation.
2. Work to understand Transformational Values and practice them in our life together, so that we build community for everyone based on collaboration and value long-term effectiveness over expedient efficiency. Examine cultural norms that emphasize outcomes over relationships and explore how they undermine a sense of belonging, relationships and the creation of Beloved Community.
3. Demonstrate our antiracist commitment in our personal lives by speaking against acts of oppression, injustice, bigotry and hate speech as we seek to be the body of Christ.
4. Actively build relationships with people who are different from ourselves so that we can see the image of God in each other.
5. Worship in ways that cultivate, support and welcome people of all cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds and in ways that lead members of Fourth Church to reflect on and pursue a better understanding of Racism and White Privilege. This is a both/and practice, an expansive posture of including diverse styles along with European-centered styles.⁷
6. Preach in ways that help those in the pews understand that an antiracism stance is not an anti-White agenda but a fulfillment of God's calling for us to unconditionally love and embrace all people as God's Beloved Community. This is even more essential as we seek to be the body of Christ in a world brimming with tension, fear and violence.
7. Seek to identify obstacles embedded in our standards, practices, policies and programs that work as barriers to full participation of BIPOCs and implement changes that make our antiracism commitment a visible reality. In doing so, we commit to listening to and validating the voices, concerns and opinions of BIPOCs and to intentionally include these diverse voices in this process.
8. Provide antiracist education to everyone at Fourth Church, with a special emphasis on council and committee chairs, new officers, new members, and allocating educational resources to young children, youth and parents to combat generational Racism.
9. In a spirit of collaboration and humility, actively build institutional relationships between Fourth Church and diverse faith communities and other groups engaged in antiracism work.

10. Partner with and support organizations that work against institutional oppression and for public policies to implement racial justice, especially in the areas of voting rights, inclusion efforts, equitable allocation of resources, criminal justice, treatment of migrants, housing access, mass incarceration and public education.
11. Support BIPOC-owned businesses to strengthen economic opportunity and facilitate more equitable resource sharing.
12. More fully implement the three-year council and committee rotation policy to promote better BIPOC representation on councils, including in leadership roles.
13. Include in the annual reports of our committees and councils to Session how our anti-racism commitment is being implemented.
14. Communicate to our congregants the antiracism reports, activities, resolutions and actions of the Presbyterian Church (USA), NEXT Church (a network of church leaders who seek to confront systems and structures of oppression), the Chicago Presbytery, Matthew 25 Churches⁸, and other churches.
15. Consider becoming a PC(USA) Matthew 25 Church, which would include gaining access to resources for dismantling structural Racism as well as partnership opportunities with other Matthew 25 churches.
16. Reflect regularly on our efforts to ensure that we are not acting merely symbolically but actively embracing antiracism as a fundamental part of Fourth Church to eliminate injustices regardless of Race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity or physical ability.

We recognize that we will not be perfect in meeting these commitments. However, this covenant represents a pathway forward that reflects our commitment to making our very best efforts to become an antiracist faith community. Portions of this covenant may be communicated and adapted to various uses, such as publication on the website, citations in the worship bulletin, or use in liturgies during worship.

GLOSSARY

- **Beloved Community**⁹ – a community in which differences are seen as assets that are celebrated and experienced as strengths so that all people feel deep belonging and a shared sense of humanity, seeing the image of God in each other.
- **Black/Indigenous/People of Color (BIPOC)** – there are a number of ways that people of color identify by Race; we use Black/Indigenous/People of Color (BIPOC) in this document, recognizing that some prefer BIPOC and some prefer People of Color (POC). We recognize the insufficiency in naming the identities of others and affirm people’s right to self-identify.
- **Doctrine of Discovery** - Actions and documents which established a spiritual, political, and legal justification for colonization and seizure of land not inhabited by Christians. Foundational elements of the Doctrine of Discovery can be found in a series of papal decrees, beginning in the 1100s.
- **Race** – a social construct based on skin color that operates to install hierarchies of oppression and benefits.
- **Racism** – Racism is a system of racial prejudice exerted by those in power — institutionally and individually, consciously and unconsciously — that is deeply ingrained in history. It privileges people who are racialized as White and undermines those who are racialized as not-White.
- **Transformational Values**⁶ – Transformational values are needed to support a more inclusive culture for antiracism to flourish. They include, but are not limited to: (i) **both/and thinking** with a bias toward action, acknowledging multiple ways to do things and working through differences to find solutions that move toward goals while not allowing conflict to result in indecision and immobility; (ii) **an abundant worldview** that operates from a premise of having an abundance of power and explores how to use that power, which changes how one understands resources and how they are used; (iii) **transparent communication and decision making** that guards personal integrity by maintaining confidentiality vs. a secrecy/need-to-know basis where information is power; (iv) **cooperation and collaboration** where individual creativity happens within the parameters of an accountable, responsible relationship with the rest of the community/group.
- **White Privilege** – a built-in advantage, based on skin color, that is separate from one’s level of income, socioeconomic background, or effort. It refers to an unearned advantage conferred systematically through no action of one’s own. For example, White people can be well assured that when they shop, they will easily find products that fit their tastes and needs and will not be followed or harassed by store personnel, and when they are in White neighborhoods, they will not be stopped by police.
- **White Supremacy/presumed White superiority** – a system of beliefs and attitudes that subtly or explicitly esteem those racialized as White and continues to grant them advantages. This can range from explicit violence to enforce White Supremacy, to the subtle implicit biases that grant White Privilege to fair-skinned individuals, creating a White-centered culture.
- **White/Whiteness/People Racialized as White** – those accorded certain benefits, privileges, and advantages based on the color of their skin because of undismantled White Supremacy that seeks to create social hierarchies by Race. We capitalize “White” to emphasize that Whiteness is a particular phenomenon with a specific function.

NOTES (Links active as of May 23, 2025)

1. PC(USA) Book of Order, F.1.0303, “The Calling of the Church/The Notes of the Reformed Church.”
https://www.pcusa.org/sites/default/files/boo_final_large_print_2023-2025_v2.pdf
2. The commitment to anti-racism at Fourth Presbyterian Church is in alignment with parallel work at the denominational and presbytery levels. *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community Churchwide Antiracism Policy* was adopted by the 222nd **PC(USA) General Assembly (2016)**. [Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community Churchwide Antiracism Policy | Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#); The **Presbytery of Chicago** has a standing C.A.R.E. commission (Commission on Anti- racism and Racial Equity) whose mandate is “to thoroughly, intentionally, and continuously assist the Presbytery of Chicago to root out and dismantle the evils of racism and white supremacy embedded in our structures and assist the presbytery to become a model for an inclusive, anti-racist, multicultural community free of all types of bias.” <https://chicagopresbytery.org/teams-committees/>
3. “As it participates in God’s mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks...a new openness in its own membership, **becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of all people of all ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, genders, and worldly conditions**, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity...(Book of Order, F-1.0404, “Openness”) https://www.pcusa.org/sites/default/files/boo_final_large_print_2023-2025_v2.pdf
4. SOURCE: *Chicago is on the Lands of the Potawatomi: Why Land Acknowledgements for Chicago should acknowledge this historical fact*, by John N. Low, Chicago History, (Fall/Winter 2022-23) <https://johnnlow.com/>. See also *Imprints: The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians and the City of Chicago*, by John Low (2016 Michigan State University Press).
5. See especially, *Things Left Undone*, an essay written on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Fourth Church: <https://www.fourthchurch.org/about/history/part-7.html> “Equally upsetting was Fourth Church’s lack of engagement with the civil rights movement during Anderson’s tenure, particularly when juxtaposed with other leaders in the PC(USA) at the time....[Presbyterian Stated Clerk of the denomination] Blake would become an outspoken advocate of the civil rights movement, eventually helping to organize the 1963 March on Washington and being arrested in Baltimore for trying to desegregate a park. Anderson largely avoided the subject entirely, reminiscent of John Timothy Stone’s passive silence in the wake of the 1919 Race Riots.” Pastor Anderson’s son, Harrison Ray Anderson Jr., reflected in an interview in 1994 that his father “resented attempts to integrate Fourth Church because it was cause-oriented rather than inspired by the gospel.” *The Gold Coast Church and the Ghetto: Christ and Culture in Mainline Protestantism*, by James K. Wellman, Jr. (1999), page 108.
6. Transformational Values – as developed by Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training, <https://springfieldop.org/wp-content/uploads/dialog-4-transforming-values1.pdf>, <https://crossroadsantiracism.org/>
7. “Christian worship is contextual...It is also **cross-cultural**—reflecting the diversity of traditions and cultures within and beyond the community of faith. Christian worship is **transcultural**—proclaiming the universal message of God’s grace in Jesus Christ and rooted in common elements of human life that transcend all cultures. It is also **countercultural**—asserting the scandal of the gospel and anticipating God’s reign of righteousness, justice, and peace. Finally, faithful worship should be an **intercultural** event—fostering mutuality, dialogue, and equality among all people. Whenever and wherever we gather in Jesus’ name, we join the praise and prayer of the people of God in every time and place. Therefore, it is fitting that we share stories and sing songs from cultures other than our own as we pray for and with the Church throughout the world.” (Book of Order, W-1.0304, “Culture”)
8. See Matthew 25 Churches in the PC(USA). <https://pcusa.org/matthew25> The three core pillars of a Matthew 25 church are (i) building congregational vitality by fostering spiritual growth and community involvement, (ii) dismantling structural racism by promoting awareness, understanding and action to eliminate racism in all its forms, and (iii) eradicating systemic poverty through advocacy, service and partnership to create just systems and opportunities for all people to thrive.
9. The core value of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s quest for Beloved Community was agape love. “...the love of God operating in the human heart.” <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>

SELECTED RESOURCES (Links active as of May 23, 2025)

The Confession of 1967:9.44, PC(USA) Book of Confessions, <https://pcusa.org/sites/default/files/boc2016.pdf>

The Confession of Belhar (1986) [The Confession of Belhar with references | Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#)

Presbytery of Chicago's Commission on Antiracism and Equity (CARE) <https://chicagopresbytery.org/teams-committees/>

Matthew 25 Churches in the PC(USA) <https://pcusa.org/matthew25>

Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community, 222nd General Assembly (2016) [Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community Churchwide Antiracism Policy | Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#)

Becoming the Beloved Community, Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc. https://pcusa.org/sites/default/files/becomingbeloved.short_.pdf

White Supremacy Culture—Still Here by Tema Okun (May 2021), www.whitesupremacyculture.info/characteristics

Why 'Presbyterians Affirm Black Lives Matter'? (Aug 2020) [Why 'Presbyterians Affirm Black Lives Matter'? | Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#)

Anti-racism work is heart work, PC(USA) Presbyterian Mission (2021) [Anti-racism work is heart work | Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#)

Report of the Special Committee on Racism, Truth and Reconciliation (SCRTR), PC(USA) 225th General Assembly (2022) [Final Report: Special Committee on Racism Truth and Reconciliation | Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#)

PC(USA) leaders condemn white supremacy, racism (2017) [PC\(USA\) leaders condemn white supremacy, racism | Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#)

Our Statement of Confession, Repentance and Repair for the Sins of Racism, The Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (2023) <https://www.ppcbooks.com/our-history>

Antiracism Policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Investment & Loan Program, Inc. [Antiracism-Policy.pdf](#)

NEXT Church Antiracism Work (2022) [Antiracism Work - NEXT Church](#)

The Sin of Racism: A Call to Covenant A Pastoral Letter from the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church (March 2006) Pg 143-150
https://www.episcopalrochester.org/sites/default/files/files/The_Sin_of_Racism2006.pdf

West End United Methodist Church Antiracism Covenant <https://www.westendumc.org/antiracism-covenant>

Anti-Racism Covenant- A Covenant to Root Out Racism, crafted by Rt. Rev. Deon K. Johnson, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri <https://antiracismcovenant.org>

The King Center <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>

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