

***Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC)***  
***Report on the Church's Effort to Combat Racism***  
216TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2004)

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

1. Direct Racial Ethnic Ministries to establish an Antiracism Institute to provide training for Antiracism facilitators, continuing education opportunities for pastors and others engaged in racial justice ministries, to begin in 2005.

2. Foster the development of a theology for racial justice through the establishment of a theologian in residence as part of the Antiracism Institute.

3. Encourage Racial Ethnic Ministries, in partnership with ACREC, Peacemaking, the Washington Office, and other program areas, as appropriate, to host a Convocation on the Status of Church and Race.

4. Direct Racial Ethnic Ministries to provide information and promote the use of antiracism training resources by middle governing bodies and local congregations. Encourage antiracism dialogue by middle governing bodies and local congregations and other activities to address issues of systemic racism and foster an antiracist identity at all levels of the church.

5. Encourage middle governing bodies and local congregations to visit the Websites of Racial Ethnic Ministries program Area, Office of Racial Justice, and the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns [[www.pcusa.org/racialjustice](http://www.pcusa.org/racialjustice); [www.pcusa.org/acrec](http://www.pcusa.org/acrec)].

6. Commend the seminaries for the work they have done through the Consultation on Theological Education and Race

- a. to equip faculty to be more responsive to the needs of racial ethnic students;
- b. to better equip all seminarians to minister in multicultural settings;
- c. to encourage them to continue their work to assess systemic barriers to dismantling racism;
- d. to provide course offerings that support antiracism ministry; and,
- e. working in partnership with Racial Ethnic Ministries and the antiracism institute, to provide continuing education experiences for pastors and lay leaders.

7. Encourage the colleges and universities, working in partnership with the Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities (APCU), Racial Ethnic

**Ministries, and other appropriate entities or related agencies, to create a forum for dialogue to share their experiences in promoting diversity in faculty and student bodies, responding to the needs of racial ethnic students, and addressing issues of systemic racism that impact their institutions.**

**8. Direct Racial Ethnic Ministries to assist the National Presbyterian Black Caucus to develop a Strategy for Church Growth for African American congregations.**

### *Rationale*

This recommendation is a final response to the following referral: *2001 Referral: 25.231. Response to Recommendation Requesting the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) to Prepare an Analysis of the Church's Effort to Combat Racism and Live Out Its Antiracism Commitments (Minutes, 2001, Part I, pp. 55, 286).*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a long history of support for inclusion and justice for all persons. However, the church's concerns for combating racism has been a difficult struggle that requires discernment, prayer, vision, and worship based on commitment and action. The 211th General Assembly (1999) approved a policy document to shepherd the church's ministry of racial justice throughout its governing bodies. This document, *Facing Racism: a Vision of the Beloved Community*, highlighted the evolution of the church's historic public policy of active involvement in the American Civil Rights Movement and provided an analysis of racism in American society. The document also outlined strategies for a churchwide program of antiracism efforts that empowered the church to a sense of urgency and essential involvement in the struggle for racial justice.

To reinforce the church's commitment in its struggle for racial justice, a policy statement on "Building Community Among Strangers" was approved. It was presented for guidance and edification to the whole church and the society to which it ministers, and determined procedures and programs for ministries and staff of the General Assembly. In addition, this policy statement was recommended as a plan for study and action by all governing bodies of the church. The policy statement presented a theological understanding for challenges presented by the new reality of building community among strangers. Facing the challenges that diversity and pluralism offered our nation and our church, it acknowledged that we are all indeed strangers who have something to contribute to each other and that we are challenged to affirm each other even when we do not understand each other.

The PC(USA) has taken steps to begin implementation of the sevenfold strategy outlined in the Facing Racism paper. However, progress on implementation has not moved forward with the sense of urgency called for, nor has it permeated as broadly or as deeply throughout the denomination as envisioned. Critical areas remain to be addressed to promote an antiracism identity throughout the denomination and to provide training,

networking, and theological dialogue to sustain the church's ministry for racial justice and adoption of a proactive antiracist identity.

The strategy to dismantle racism is based on the understanding that open, constructive dialogue is a necessary starting point and it identifies seven points of engagement: the General Assembly, synods, presbyteries, congregations, educational institutions, related agencies, and ecumenical partners.

To this end, a training manual has been developed and facilitators trained to provide antiracism training. The network of antiracism facilitators includes a team of national trainers, a team of trainers for the Presbyterian Center, and fifty-two members of Presbyterian Women have been trained. Antiracism training was provided for all commissioners to the 213th General Assembly (2001). All staff at the Presbyterian Center receive eight hours of training in their first year of employment, as mandated by the General Assembly Council.

Training events have been provided in several presbyteries, facilitated by national staff and national antiracism facilitators. A number of presbyteries have formed antiracism teams that are engaged in developing local strategies and providing training for congregations within their presbyteries. Presbyterian Women (PW) have been implementing training at various levels of their organization, including many of their presbytery-level gatherings and some PW antiracism facilitators are working ecumenically to address issues in their local communities.

A Consultation on Theological Education and Racism was held in April 2003, with participation from every seminary. It addressed curriculum and pedagogical issues, with the goal of equipping faculty to be more responsive to the needs of a diverse student body and to better equip all students to minister in a multicultural environment. A steering committee was formed, which is planning a second consultation in the 2004-2005 academic year. With the endorsement of the Committee on Theological Education, this consultation will focus on ways to address systemic issues racism. In preparation for this consultation, the Steering Committee is conducting a survey of the seminaries.

Funding has been allocated in the 2004 budget for the Office of Racial Justice and Advocacy for the development of curriculum resources for children and youth.

Presbyterian Women and the Peacemaking program have made antiracism a major emphasis of their national conferences, prepared study materials and other resources to promote antiracism work among their constituencies. Training for antiracism and cultural proficiency have also been incorporated in the Multicultural Conference for 2004, hosted by the Office of Evangelism and Racial/Cultural Diversity. This event is co-hosted with the Synod of the Sun and Grace Presbytery. Affiliated organizations, including Voices of Sophia and That All May Freely Serve, are engaging in dialogue, with specific attention to the creation and perpetuation of white privilege as a critical facet of systemic racism.

However, the church is still a long way from the *Facing Racism* vision of fostering constructive dialogue in all congregations, presbyteries, and synods, all facets and agencies of the church. The PC(USA) is a church struggling to promote inclusiveness, tolerance, and understanding among its racially, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse congregations. It is a church constantly striving to sow and cultivate seeds of justice in a caring and understanding fashion to its middle governing bodies and local congregations.

### *Historical Perspective*

Racism is deeply embedded in the life and history of this nation. All people of color have suffered the consequences of racism. There is also a long history of resistance to oppression by people of color. It was Black resistance in the 60s that pushed the issue of racism on the agenda of mainline churches.

Consequently, in May 1963, Edler Garnet Hawkins persuaded the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to create a Commission on Religion and Race with unusual power to act in behalf of the denomination. The assembly appropriated \$500,000 for the newly created commission. The commission was renamed the Council on Church and Race, it was the genesis of the racial justice programs now existing in the PC(USA).

In fact, during the 1970s and 1980s affirmative action and equal opportunity became central themes of mainline churches in the search for racial justice. The 193rd General Assembly (1989) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America said:

In many ways the church's failures have been due to a lack of understanding, or perhaps naiveté, as to the nature and depth of racism. Whereas it was once assumed that racial justice was merely a function of overcoming individual attitudes and bigotry, it is now clear that racism also exists in complex and subtle institutional ways. Despite the well-intentioned and nonracist attitudes of individuals, our religious and societal institutions, structures, and systems can and do perpetuate racial injustice. (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1981, Part I, p. 201)

As a result, in 1991, the 203rd General Assembly (1991) passed a resolution confessing to the ongoing struggle of Presbyterians against racism in and outside the church.

We acknowledge and confess that:

The Presbyterian Church has failed to respond faithfully to the gospel and the racial justice challenges it set forth for itself, as expressed in both its confessional statements and its past pronouncements. . . . This failure is found at all levels of the church, including those groups and instrumentalities charged with racial justice responsibilities. . . .

The reasons put forth for failure and the lack of action by the church are very familiar ones that have been articulated frequently over the years. . . . [T]he major obstacle to racial justice in society, as well as in the church, is in the nature of racism itself. Racism has developed primarily as a means to protect and legitimize the privilege of one race over the others. . . . (*Minutes*, 1991, Part I, p. 695).

In 1993, the 205th General Assembly (1993) approved the creation of the two advocacy committees with direct access to the General Assembly and General Assembly Council, one of which is the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC). The 207th General Assembly (1995) elected the first class of ACREC members who met for the first time in the fall of 1995. The mission of this committee is to advocate for full access for all racial ethnic/immigrant groups to all programs, ministries, middle governing bodies, and congregations in the PC(USA) by monitoring implementation of policy and corresponding actions, decisions, and issues of concern to people of color in the church and in their communities. The ACREC reviews all actions coming before the General Assembly for any impact on people of color and provides advice and counsel to the commissioners.

The ACREC was successful in getting the 213th General Assembly (2001) approval for two other task forces: a Task Force to Study the Issue of Reparations, and a Task Force to Examine the Electoral System in the United States of America. Both of these task forces are expected to report to the 216th General Assembly (2004). The ACREC Task Force to Examine General Assembly Entities: Creating a Climate for Change, will also be presented to the 216th General Assembly (2004). The ACREC wrote several advice and counsel memoranda for the 215th General Assembly (2003). They were #03-14, (11-05), the Crisis of Migrant Worker Deaths in the Borderlands and the need for a new border policy; #03-24 (11-06), on an end to the U.S. embargo against Cuba; and #03-28 (07-05) Action for Wellness and Healing for the Saint Lawrence Island Yupik people. The ACREC has conducted a one-hour briefing for commissioners at each assembly beginning with the 208th General Assembly (1996).