Great Plains Cabinet Anti-Racism Statement

Ongoing racialized unrest because of the overuse of force by police against black and brown bodies, African American people in particular, has compelled us as the Great Plains Bishop and Cabinet to stand with and seek to offer prophetic pastoral care to our active and retired African-American clergy in the Great Plains Conference and to the 3,443 members of our 12 Black United Methodist Churches—a mere 1.8% of our total annual conference membership. We also look to offer prophetic pastoral care and concern for the 260,661 Black people in Kansas and Nebraska who are not yet part of our United Methodist congregations. We understand African Americans are outraged and exhausted by centuries of endless struggle for human dignity, racial justice, and equality regarding education, housing, health care, criminal justice, employment, and economic opportunity.

As the Bishop and Cabinet of the Great Plains Conference, we lament the present state of race relationships in the United States and look to be instruments of God’s healing, peace, and justice in our local contexts, in Kansas and Nebraska, and within a world torn apart and traumatized by human selfishness, oppression, fear, and injustice.

We acknowledge that our nation, in part, has not moved past our racial history of segregation, discrimination, mistreatment, exclusion, and elimination of non-white peoples. This history continues to manifest itself in individual and structural racism that it is deeply rooted, pervasive and widely embedded across American society.

We acknowledge that racism is complex and can be conscious or unintentional. We reject the idea that white people have innate superiority to Black people, indigenous people and non-white people and therefore qualify as more deserving of the benefits of society.

We assert that we are making a theological and missional statement—not political—and denounce the sin of racism as antithetical to the gospel and an affront to God who made us in God’s image. We affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all people created in the image of God and that all people have dignity and value and have the right to justice and equitable rights as members of society. We celebrate in the gifts that ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life.

We affirm that our identity and actions as Christ’s disciples within a United Methodist and Wesleyan tradition assumes the perspective and defense of the marginalized, the poor, the exploited, the powerless and the victims, rather than the powerful.
We the Bishop and Cabinet of the Great Plains conference, resolve to interrogate our own behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs about race with humility and openness to repentance. We will increase our awareness of the existence and perpetuation of systemic practices, institutional legacies, and unconscious racial biases in the appointive process, hiring practices, and choice of leaders for conference and district positions, committees, and boards.

We resolve to continuously educate ourselves through available instructional resources to understand white supremacy and white privilege and how this ideology creates and perpetuates bigotry, hate, systemic racism, discrimination, exploitation, inequality, and injustice in society.

We explicitly and publicly affirm that we will earnestly strive to be an anti-racist conference of The United Methodist Church and reflect that in our language and conversations, our racial inclusiveness, our hospitality to the strangers and aliens among us, our ministries, practices, and policies.

We resolve to encourage and support necessary conversations within our congregations about race and the inclusive nature of the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races.

To date, our clergy have preached on the sin of racism and how racism is contrary to the gospel. Some of our clergy and laypersons have marched in solidarity and support of equality, equity, and racial justice for Black lives. Congregations have engaged in Bible and book studies on white privilege, white supremacy, and racism. We have reached out to Black churches in our communities where possible. Our clergy, congregations, and denomination have offered many webinars to discuss and become more aware of the insidious realities of systemic racism and its harmful effects on Black people, Indigenous people, and non-white people.

In August, Galinda Burton, interim general secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR), conducted anti-racism training for our conference directors and coordinators. In September, Michelle Ledder, also with GCORR, conducted an anti-racist workshop for the Cabinet that offered concrete actions that we can take as conference leadership to disrupt and dismantle racism. Plans are underway to make anti-racism training for clergy part of their equipping to disrupt and dismantle racism as an integral part of their work as spiritual leaders, servants and witnesses for Christ in the world.

Our conference Congregational Excellence department will commit a portion of its budget to develop and implement anti-racist resources and training. A resource guide and summer 2021 Vacation Bible School curriculum is under development that will promote and celebrate Christ’s love for all people of every age, nation, and race. Each Congregational Excellence team member is now trained to coach on implementing anti-racist strategies, and they stand ready to assist networks and churches in their anti-racist work and witness.

We recognize that disrupting, dismantling, and eradicating deeply rooted, pervasive, and widely embedded racism in our society requires a spiritual and collective transformation of minds, hearts, and wills, repentance, and the grace of forgiveness to move forward. We recognize that structural and institutional changes that reflect that transformation must also occur. We believe that this work of transformation is worthy of our calling as God’s diverse and beloved children and as Christ’s disciples.
We support and pass on the idea that non-white people should not be the only ones responsible to shoulder the burden of seeking equality and racial justice for themselves. We stress that is more so the responsibility of white people to do the work of self-education about racism, be anti-racist, and actively challenge racist structures, ideals, and systems in whatever forms they present themselves.

Therefore, we call upon our United Methodist clergy, laity, and congregations to pray without ceasing for racial healing in America, to interrogate our own behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs about race, and to intentionally and continuously take actions to learn and openly talk about the insidious nature of racism. We call upon Great Plains United Methodists to disrupt and dismantle racism within all aspects of congregational and community life in whatever form it presents itself.

Our prayerful hope is that our collective actions and prophetic witness will inspire others in our families, communities, states, and nation to disrupt and dismantle racism, be anti-racist and to work for racial equality, equity, and justice for all God’s children and a transformed world that is better for all.

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Ruben Saenz Jr.
Bishop of the Great Plains Conference

Rev. Chad Anglemyer, superintendent of the Elkhorn and Missouri River districts
Rev. Dr. Thomas Brady, superintendent of the Five Rivers and Parsons districts
Rev. Lance Clay, superintendent of the Prairie Rivers and Elkhorn Valley districts
Rev. Jennifer Collins, superintendent of the Flint Hills and Topeka districts
Rev. Dr. Anne Gatobu, superintendent of the Kansas City District
Rev. Don Hasty, superintendent of the Dodge City and Hays districts
Rev. Cindy Karges, superintendent of the Great West and Gateway districts
Rev. Nancy Lambert, Assistant to the Bishop and director of Clergy Excellence
Rev. Dr. Mitch Reece, Cabinet Dean, superintendent of the Wichita East and West districts
Rev. Nathan Stanton, director of Congregational Excellence
Rev. Dr. Nancy Tomlinson, superintendent of the Blue River and Elkhorn Valley districts
Rev. Dee Williamston, superintendent of the Salina and Hutchinson districts